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["POOR FELLOW," SAID MRS. CASTLETON; "I'LL HELP YOU IF I CAN."]

DRIVEN TO WRONG.

CHAPTER I.

THE RECTOR OF MARKET GLENTON.

THE Reverend James Hilhouse, Rector of Market Glenton, was acknowledged by all to be a very holy man.

In person he was somewhat fat, and well-liking, with a rotundity of figure which made him look easy-going, whether it belied his character or no.

If it be true that everybody who reaches the heavenward side of fifty becomes either fat or lean according to his nature, then the Reverend James must be entered in class number one, for he had some years since passed by the birthday which announced that his fifth decade had ended.

But few grey hairs had crept into the abundant, well-greased thatch of this holy man, for one of two reasons; either the gods loved him, or the grease suited the hirsute part of his constitution; indeed, it is a

question whether it did not enter the constitution itself, for Mr. Hilhouse's face quite carried out the biblical idea of oil making a cheerful countenance, and his whole appearance was oleaginous.

The living of Market Glenton was a good one, so the rector was a well-dressed man in his way, although his way might not be the way of the reader, or even of the writer of this novel.

The broadcloth was not rusty, and the fact of its appearing ill-cut and badly put together, may have been the fault of the figure, and not the tailor.

Mr. Hilhouse always showed a white shirt-front, and to do him justice—it was clean. He tied his waiter-like neckcloth in a bow of broad dimensions; for the rest, when he wore gloves, they were black, and several large seals hung from his massive gold watch chain.

He was barely a parson of the old school; not that mild-faced, gentle-voiced old cleric, whom we open our hearts to at once, and fancy must be perfect, until we personally find out his faults; nor was he one of the new. To call the Reverend James Hilhouse

a priest would be quite enough to send him off into a fit of apoplexy.

In views, he was decidedly low-church. In doctrinal opinions, evangelical; strongly bordering on the Calvinistic.

He was a married man, and was blessed with a good woman for a wife, although robust health had been denied her.

Mrs. Hilhouse was one of those plain, uninteresting creatures, whom clergymen select for their mates, lest they should, it may be supposed, bind them down to this wicked world, by ties which even though they may be chaste and holy, yet may be a device of the Evil one; for, doubtless, they bear in mind the words of St. Paul concerning married men; and having that finger-post to guide them, if they cannot quite follow out the advice of that advocate of celibacy, they can make a compromise by avoiding those charms of womanhood which may prove snares to them, even as they did to poor Holy St. Anthony himself; and which other men, who are not holy, prize but too well; and certain it is, that the Reverend James avoided the error of "trying to please his wife."

In society he invariably called her "my dear," for it was necessary that all should see the unity and peace which reigned in his household. But even though he was not a Bishop, he certainly "ruled his own house" in a way he considered "well," and kept his wife and his children "in subjection;" and if gravity be a virtue, then was the Reverend James Hilhouse a virtuous man indeed.

There was but little softness in the fallow face, and the keen steel gray eyes gave no denial to the impression conveyed by the square jaw and obstinate upper lip. He wore no moustache, but indulged in plentiful short, black whiskers, of a type not often now seen, thank Heaven!

He was certainly stern to his wife, but not, according to his light, unkind; and she believed in him, poor soul!

She was an essentially amiable woman, and did not know when she was snubbed, never having been accustomed to anything else.

She had no opinions of her own, but just echoed those of her lord and master.

She had no individuality whatever, and that suited him exactly. Had Mr. Hilhouse hunted the whole world over, he could not have secured a partner more fitted to his requirements.

He did not want a flesh and blood wife, with thoughts and feelings and passions of her own—such a monstrosity would simply have shocked him.

So this gentle automaton moved by his side through life, following his instructions, bearing him children, attending to the sick of the parish, and the many charities; and quietly grew a little wicker year by year.

Of this marriage three children had been born—a son and two daughters, who at the time the curtain ascends for this little life drama, had grown to men and women-hood.

Cecil Hilhouse had, greatly to his father's annoyance, chosen the army for his profession; and having his father's blood in his veins, he had, by power of will, overruled his point, even with that father himself.

If Mr. Hilhouse was proud of anything, besides himself, it was of his son; and the latter clause was not without reason, for Captain Cecil Hilhouse was a thoroughly good fellow.

The frankness of his father's nature made a capital ground-work on which to ingraft the gentleness which he had inherited from his mother; and this combination made a very reliable character, and one which commands respect and affection, and Cecil was the light of his mother's life.

Had she asked him to give up his own wishes, and to forego the future which he had pictured for himself, he would probably have done so, for he loved her; but she had desired no such sacrifice, and none was made.

Some years since he had gone out to India with his regiment as an Ensign, and now he was a Captain, and had written to say that a few months would see him back in Old England; and now it seemed a question whether his mother would live until the time of his expected return.

Mr. Hilhouse had decidedly noticed that his wife was not the better half of himself in fleshly matters, and he had seen, too, that her duties had become an effort to her; still they were duties, and he had not for a moment sought to relieve her of them.

He was not much of a companion to her, for when in her company he generally dozed in his easy chair, or read the *Record*, although literature, in general, was not much in his line; still he liked to know what his brothers of "the cloth" were about, and this to a certain extent the paper told him.

It must not be supposed that he wished to get rid of his wife; she was too faithful a slave for any such desire on his part, and he was dimly aware that through life she had placed herself between him and all sharp corners which might annoy; yet had not the heart to inquire if her tenderer flesh were bruised by them.

Perhaps it was the knowledge that he might not long retain this "fender," that awoke him to the fact that it was of value, for he never suggested his wife seeing the doctor till he one day came home and found her in a prolonged fainting fit; then he became alarmed. His two daughters were leaning over their mother, chafing her hands and feet in a business-like manner, their sweet faces clouded and tearful.

"When did this come on, Ellen?" he asked the younger of the two.

"More than a quarter of an hour ago," she returned nervously. "I am sorry; we could not bring her round, Papa, before you came home."

"It would have spared my feelings certainly," he said, with a sigh that troubles should have reached him in this or in any other form.

"We have spared them long enough, papa," boldly asserted Marion Hilhouse. "Mamma would not let us tell you; but these attacks are constant, and they are milder, not by inches, but by yards; yes! miles; and I won't be silent any longer; oh! how I wish Cecil were here!"

"You forget that I am here, Marion," replied her father, sternly, "and you have failed in your duty as my elder daughter in keeping this thing from me!"

Marion was silent; she felt the justice of his words, but it had been at her mother's earnest entreaty that she had held her peace.

"Oh, papa! it is not Marion's fault," said Nellie, "mamma—"

"Do not answer me, Ellen; if your mother told your sister to do wrong, she was old enough to know better. She was well aware that I am the head of this house, and as such should be informed of all that happens beneath this roof."

Marion was the turbulent spirit of the family; she shook herself visibly at her father's words, and asked impatiently,

"Is my mother to die while you talk platitudes, papa? In Heaven's name fetch the doctor. She has never been so bad as this before. If I have wasted precious time by my silence, surely you are wasting more."

"I will reply to you another time, Marion," he said, sternly; and turned to leave the room, without stooping to press one kiss upon the pale upturned face, "I am now going for Dr. King."

"Let me run, papa," pleaded Nellie, "I shall go more quickly than you can do."

"Your place is by your mother's side, Ellen; I will go myself."

"If you would lend me your key, papa, I would get a little brandy out of the cellar; Marion thinks it would do her good!"

"I should never give brandy without the doctor's orders!"

By which speech it may be guessed that Mr. Hilhouse was a disciple of the blue ribbon. As the door shut the two girls looked at one another and sighed, while tears started to the eyes of the younger.

"Don't cry Nellie, dear; run to the chemist's and get an ounce of sal volatile. I have sixpence, and that will pay for it."

"Wouldn't papa be angry?" questioned Nellie.

"Never mind if he is, my shoulders are broad; I don't care what he says one bit."

"Oh! Marion, don't say that, it would so distress mother," and she rose to go, then turned to try and make peace.

"Mother is always telling us what a good man he is, and she must know, dear; perhaps he does not mean to be so hard."

"Mamma is an angel," replied the elder girl, impulsively, and stooped to kiss her, and Nellie went out quickly, running all the way to the chemist's and back, and returned well-nigh breathless.

"He says it can't hurt her," she gasped, "and I have brought in the water and a spoon—thirty drops first; and thirty more if she does not soon come round. You pour it, Marion, my hand shakes."

If Nellie's hand was tremulous, Marion Hilhouse's was steady enough, and she quickly arranged the dose, and placing the spoon within her mother's lips, managed to get it between her teeth.

Mr. Brown advised a mustard plaster over the heart, Marion. Dare we put it on?"

"Did he? Well, of course I dare. Order one at once!" but before the order was carried out, Dr. King arrived.

He was a man with a grave, quiet manner, upon whom you felt you could depend, and one who wasted no words.

"Syncope," he said, simply; "heart power nil! How long has Mrs. Hilhouse been in this weak state?"

"I have seen nothing in my wife's state of health to cause alarm," replied the rector stiffly.

"Then my dear sir, you must have been very blind!" said Dr. King in a tone more sharp than he was often heard to use; "this weakness is no sudden prostration, it must have been gradual—she is a living skeleton!"

"Mrs. Hilhouse was always thin!" admitted her husband, dryly.

"Get me some hot brandy and water!" said the doctor, turning to Nellie.

Nellie looked at Marion, Marion at her father.

"Brandy! oh, yes! There is some, if you order it; but I keep it under lock and key, lest the weak should be tempted. The North American Indians call it *fire water*; and there cannot be a better name for it!"

When the rector left the room, Dr. King took Marion by the hand.

"My dear," he said, "I must depend on you. You love your mother; you are self-reliant and gentle."

"Not gentle, I fear," confessed the girl, with a blush; "what has been driven out of me, if it ever existed in my nature."

"And gentle," repeated the doctor, as though he had not heard her words. "I must not hide from you that your mother is in great danger, but I hope we may keep her for a little time yet."

"A little time," echoed the girl in a choked voice; "and is that all?"

"We cannot hope for more. But now you must forget self, and be a good nurse."

The girl gave the hand she held a convulsive clasp, and turned away to obey the many orders which he gave her in his quiet, clear way; and when Mr. Hilhouse returned, he found her calmly going about her duties, and thought she did not feel.

Nellie, on the contrary, was sobbing, her head buried in her hands; and he touched her as he passed, bidding her to cheer up, for her mother would soon be better.

In half an hour the patient's eyelids quivered, and she smiled quietly at the anxious faces around her.

For some days Dr. King watched her carefully; then he sought an interview with the rector.

"Mrs. Hilhouse appears to be suffering from some prolonged mental strain," he said, decidedly. "Her duties in her weak state should long since have been laid aside; change of air and scene, and perfect rest from trouble and care of any sort, can alone do her good; and as winter is coming on, she must go to a milder climate, say Mentone."

"Leave England!" exclaimed the rector, aghast. "How am I to desert my parish?"

"I suppose you can get a *locum tenens*."

"Indeed, it is not so easy."

"Then, a curate. Mrs. Hilhouse must never again work among the poor as she has done. A curate would lighten your work."

The rector sat in gloomy silence. After a pause he once more began.

"In my opinion, invalids are better at home, and the whole thing would be most inconvenient."

Dr. King arose, quietly looked at the man before him, as though he were studying some unnatural phenomenon.

"You know best, Mr. Hilhouse, where your

duty lies," he said, gravely. "I cannot dictate to the pastor of my parish; and the lady is your wife and not mine. Still she is my patient, and as such I tell you you will be responsible for her life if you keep her in Market Glenton this winter. It is damp and cold in this low ground; the river floods will probably be out again, and the basements of all the houses under water. Mrs. Hilhouse's lungs are in a critical state; and I repeat, if she stays here, it will be at your own risk. I have warned you."

And having delivered himself of such an unusually long speech, for him he took his hat and left the room without his usual observance of courtesy, for he omitted to offer his hand to the man of God.

For a time he walked in silence, going at a brisk pace, which with him denoted impatience; and at length his wrath burst forth.

"If he be one of your holy men, give me an honest sinner!"

"Here is one at your service, doctor," laughed a silvery, ringing voice. "Is there anything I can do for you, or any one else?"

Dr. King turned suddenly, and encountered two laughing, dark-gray eyes with deep fringed lashes, and a mischievous episcopal face, peering at him from beneath the white cap of a fashionable widow's bonnet, and his features softened.

"Is that you, Mrs. Charlton? Well, I'm glad I have met you, for I was in a very bad temper, and you always do me good."

"There's a confession," she returned. "I suppose you haven't acquainted Mrs. King with your feelings?"

"Have I not, though! Indeed I have."

"Well?"

"Well! She is not a saint; so she is as fond of you as I am."

And he held out his hand to her.

"You are a dear," said the little widow, warmly. "And you cannot think how glad I am to have so good a friend."

"I do not think any one could be aught but good to you, Mrs. Charlton."

"Do you not?" she replied, a sadness gathering in her speaking eyes—a sadness which spoke of some trouble past, at which, for the moment, she was gazing back.

"Perhaps I am not so delightful a creature as you, in the kindness of your heart, think me; for, in my short life, I have met with plenty of rough as well as smooth things."

"Jealousy, my dear lady, nothing else, depend upon it, or else they were not worthy of you; no true man could be unkind to you, or rough either."

"True!" she laughed, bitterly. "My dear doctor, you have lived more than twice as long in the world as I have, but you have not seen so much of it as I have done, living in your quiet little country town home, and I can but say with Pilate, *What is truth?* It is a question which was asked a good many years ago, and has never been satisfactorily answered, yet; 'tis true, 'tis pity; pity 'tis, 'tis true."

"You are a pessimist, I fear," replied the doctor, with a smile.

"A pessimist! Well, perhaps I am. And yet, on the other hand, I am not. I do believe in the sinfulness and wickedness of humanity; but I believe, too, in its power of being good. I would have everyone raise a high standard, and strive to live up to it. If they fall, I would have their friends gather round them, and place them on their feet again, not desert them as though they were plague-stricken. If you want to help a man who has fallen, get as close to him as you can, or you may be sure you cannot assist him at all," and she raised an earnest, grave face to the doctor.

"And you would not fear being contaminated by the pitch which blackens your friend's character?"

"No, I should not; you cannot take harm when you are trying to do good."

"Have you informed your rector of your opinions?"

"No. I have only seen him two or three times; tell me, is he nice?"

"I will leave you to judge for yourself, Mrs. Charlton. His son is a friend of yours; it is better you should get on, if you can."

"You seem to doubt it. What is wrong with him?"

"If I said everything, you would think me uncharitable."

"Or a pessimist," she added, mischievously.

"One who sees the evil and denies the good."

"Come, come, this is not fair; you carry too many guns for me."

"We have to, in India; there are so many reptiles about; one must keep them at bay."

"Human ones, eh?"

"Just so."

"Well, you don't think me a reptile, I hope?"

"You! How fond you are of compliments. Did I not tell you I thought you a dear?"

"Oh! Mrs. Charlton, Mrs. Charlton! A compliment is only a delicate envelope in which to wrap a speech which has no meaning—which expresses, in fact, not quite what you really think."

"I am corrected; a compliment is a wrong term, but the speech was nevertheless sincere."

"I believe you."

"That is right; and now I am wasting your precious time."

"Not at all. I was in a vile temper, and you have exorcised the demon."

"I am glad of that; but what was the matter?"

"A good woman's life has been sacrificed to neglect, that is all."

"Enough, too. Can I do anything?"

"Yes! Go and cheer her up."

"Who is it?"

"Mrs. Hilhouse."

"Good Heavens! Cecil's mother!"

It was a lapsus, and she blushed when she had said it, and looked shyly into the doctor's face; but Dr. King, although he heard it, took not the faintest notice, and she was grateful to him. Then she placed her hand on his arm, and said gravely,—

"You do not mean that her husband has neglected her, surely? I have always heard of him as being *such a good man*."

"Quite true; he has been thirty years rector of this parish, and no one has ever yet been able to put their finger upon the smallest blot in his morals," returned the doctor, seriously, while the corners of his kindly mouth twitched.

"As if I meant that," replied the widow, indignantly. "I declare, you are not half so nice as I thought you, so I will not say another word;" then in a moment she added, "Tell me, what is the matter with Mrs. Hilhouse?"

"Oh! Mrs. Charlton, no wonder you are no believer in truth, when you do not practice it; nine words, and you were not going to speak one."

"Doctor, you are a horror!"

"So Mrs. King says; but believe me, it is my misfortune, and not my fault."

Mrs. Charlton tapped a very pretty little foot impatiently upon the ground.

"I want to know how Mrs. Hilhouse is?"

"She is, in point of fact, dying. If the rector follows my advice she may, and probably will, live for some time yet; but it is too late to do much for her."

"And why did you not do something before?"

"Because I was not called in."

"And why were you not?"

"That is best known to Mr. Hilhouse!"

"He couldn't have seen her danger?"

"I suppose not!"

"And what are you going to do for her?"

"I have told her husband to take her to Mentone, but I don't know if he will do it; she is very anxious to live to see her son."

"He shall do it!" she cried, passionately, "I'll make him!"

"Well, I believe if anyone could you can,"

he laughed, and so they parted; he to see his patients, she to assail the fortress of the adamant rector.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. CHARLTON.

A few minutes later Mrs. Charlton was ushered into Mr. Hilhouse's private sitting-room.

"As a friend of your son's," she said, honestly, "I have come to ask if I can be of any use to you, now you are in trouble. I have only just learnt how ill your dear wife has been, and I fear I may add, still is."

"You are very good," replied the rector, slowly; "but Mrs. Hilhouse has her daughters, and Ellen is a very feeling child. I do not think she can want for anything."

"Still sympathy is always acceptable, even from those outside the pale of the home circle; it helps us to bear trouble better. Do you not think so?"

"I have always been a very practical man myself, Mrs. Charlton, and therefore cannot quite follow you; but it seems to me that it is religion which should help us in bearing our troubles, and that in nothing else shall we find comfort if we are the children of God!"

"Oh, but surely, Mr. Hilhouse, God gives us our friends and our home ties, and means them to be of some use to us, and happiness, too, outside anything religious!"

"He gives them to us that they may help us serve Him; not for our own selfish pleasures!"

"Oh, dear! I should not like my husband, if I had one, to hold that view of me, that I was made only to assist him to carry out his duties."

"I should think, Mrs. Charlton, you could desire no higher lot than to be the helpmeet of a good man."

"A helpmeet, no!" she answered, with an earnest far off look; "a woman could desire no better fate than that, taking the word in its full and true meaning; but I cannot narrow my acceptance of it to duty alone. A woman should share a man's joys and his sorrows, should be to him a wise friend and counsellor, and should be herself his greatest joy of all."

"You forget religion," he began.

"No; I do not; a woman's love is a part of her religion!"

"I fear your opinions are scarcely orthodox," he asserted, a smile creeping to his lips in spite of himself, "Mrs. Charlton, you are rather a dangerous woman."

"Do you mean that I have convinced you there is something else besides duty in the world?" she asked, laughing; "if so I am glad!"

"I mean that some women have unusual power over men, and I think you are one of them; this gift in the hands of a child of God may be used to advantage; but in those of a daughter of Belial—"

"Meaning me?" she asked, innocently.

"Heaven forbid!" he returned with fervour; "you were introduced to us by my son, and you have been received into my family—have associated with my wife and daughters!"

"Have you remarked any visible change for the worse in them since they made my acquaintance?" she inquired, her eyes dancing with mischief.

He smiled too.

"Not so far," he confessed, at length. "But bad seed, like good seed, takes a certain amount of time to grow; and now tell me, Mrs. Charlton, what you have to say to me, for I am not blind enough not to see you came with an object."

"I do not deny it. I want you to let me sit with your wife a little."

"But the doctor ordered her to be kept quiet."

"Just so. I will be very quiet indeed—invalids always like me about them."

"If Mrs. Hilhouse wishes it I can have no objection," he said, after a pause.

"Thank you. I expect I shall be able to help her to get away comfortably—you can't think how well I pack!" and she smiled up at the Rector.

"I do not know that any packing will be required," he returned, dryly; "there is much to be thought of and settled before I could leave home."

"I understood from Dr. King that it was imperative," she said, looking at him so gravely and firmly that he dropped his eyes before her.

Then she went to him and placed her hand upon his coat-sleeve.

"Mr. Hilhouse," she continued, earnestly, "every one tells me that you are a good man; now let me see that the assertion they make is the truth—you will take your wife wherever our kind friend the doctor thinks you ought to go. Remember all her years of faith and love, and how, even when suffering, she has done her duty; I hear her spoken of with respect by all."

"Now, tell me, what would your feelings be if, when Cecil returns, his mother should be dead, and your parishioners, who believed in you, should say, 'her life might have been prolonged, but your father would not consent to it?' Think of it, Mr. Hilhouse, and, whatever you do, do not fail in your duty to your wife. Others can take your place as a pastor. You alone will be responsible for her well-being: believe me, I speak the bare truth."

The Rector of Market Glenton sat with his hand upon his brow, in deep thought—then he raised his heavy face, and looked at Mrs. Charlton curiously.

"I have been twenty-five years rector of this parish, and you are the first person who has ever ventured to tell me what it is my duty to do, or not to do," he said, slowly.

"And you do not quite know what to make of it?" she continued, smiling.

"I must confess I am surprised."

"But not displeased?" she added, coaxingly.

"I am sure you are too just to be annoyed at what has been said solely out of kindness. Think what your feelings would be if you refused to go away—and lost your wife! would it not be a bitter reflection for you, that you had not done all you could? I wish to save you from such a reflection."

"You are right," he acknowledged, at last.

"I must go. It is very uncongenial to me, very; but I see my duty points that way. I cannot deny that Mrs. Hilhouse has been faithful to the trust reposed in her; and I must put self aside for her sake."

"That is right. And you are not offended with me?"

"No; I believe you meant well."

"Thank you. And now let me see your invalid."

He led her in, and the gleam of kindly welcome which shot from the sick woman's eyes, told that Mrs. Charlton was a welcome visitor.

Mr. Hilhouse looked with surprise at the effect her presence appeared to have upon his wife and children, and went back to his study to think it out.

After awhile he said somewhat impatiently,—

"I cannot comprehend it. She has made me do what I had determined not to do! She has hectoring me—simply hectoring me—in my own house! and I have borne it meekly. She goes into my wife's room, and there sad faces brighten as though the sun had shone upon them. What is the secret of that woman's influence? Does it come of good or evil?"

In the meantime Mrs. Charlton had laid aside her hat, and her gold, brown hair was rippling artistically around the sweet face; the earnest, grey eyes were looking almost lovingly into those of the sick woman's, and a soft, white hand was stroking the long bony one with a delicate, caressing touch.

Yes, she loved this woman, unattractive as

she was, for another's sake! and for that other's sake Mrs. Hilhouse loved Elsie Charlton, knowing with love's intuition that she was dear to her absent son.

Marion and Ellen gathered round her with eager faces, because she seemed to them an idyl, with her beautiful features, her perfect figure, and her gentle winning ways.

She was to them a vision of that life from which they were shut out, and the sight of her brought to them vivid fancies of the outside world, as the scent of a flower may bring a memory of the dead past.

"Oh! Mrs. Charlton, how good of you," cried impressionable Nellie, throwing her arms around her neck, "how good of you to come!"

"Not at all!" she answered; "why did you not send for me? I believe I am a good nurse, my patients tell me so."

Marion held her hand in a warm clasp, which said more than words, and the dark eyes, so like those of Cecil Hilhouse, drew the young widow's heart to her.

"I am sure you are good at everything!" exclaimed Nellie, effusively. "How happy you must be!"

"Happy!" she echoed, rather wistfully.

"Oh! I am happy enough."

"I should like to change places with you," continued Nellie; "you have a lovely home of your own, and plenty of money; every one loves you, and, above all, you have your freedom. A young widow's life must be a delightful one."

"A loving wife's is far happier, Nellie," she said softly; "and I hope to see you that some day."

"I do not see how we are likely ever to marry," said Marion. "Papa never asks any one to the house."

"Does he not?—well, but perhaps he will not object to your going out sometimes."

"Indeed he will—he would not permit it for a moment—his war-or is duty, and pleasure he thinks a device of Satan."

"Darling! do not speak so of your father," said Mrs. Hilhouse feebly; "he knows more of the world than you do, and wishes to shield you from evil."

Mrs. Charlton knew in her heart that this was the very way to drive high-spirited girls into evil, if ever they got a chance; and mentally told herself that she would once more try and influence the rector, and this time in their favour; but she held her peace, so as not to raise false hopes.

"Well, now," she said brightly, "would you not like to travel?"

"To travel! of course we should; we have scarcely been out of Market Glenton all the years of our lives."

"But Dr. King thinks dear Mrs. Hilhouse should go abroad, so that will be something for you to look forward to, at any rate."

"Papa will never go," said Marion, decidedly.

"I think he will," returned Mrs. Charlton, with a smile.

"What makes you think so?"

"I do believe you have asked him yourself?" cried Nellie, triumphantly; "and of course he couldn't refuse you, no one could."

"Well, we certainly have been talking about it, and he sees he ought to go."

"That is a victory," laughed Nellie, joyfully. "Oh! Mrs. Charlton, you could melt a heart of stone if you can melt papa."

"Nellie, Nellie, don't, my dear, my head aches so!"

In a moment Mrs. Charlton's hand was upon the sufferer's forehead.

"How hot it is! Get me some gin, Nellie, and I will make some lotion to put on it; there is nothing so cooling as a piece of linen dipped in it, and laid over the temples."

"Gin! we have not such a thing in the house."

"Oh! I forgot, you are blue ribbonites; but never mind, Nellie, dear, you won't object to going to my house and bringing some of that obnoxious liquid, will you? You can take a

couple of medicine bottles and fill them; no one would be any the wiser."

"But where shall I find it?" asked the girl.

"In the sideboard, or rather cellarette, left-hand cupboard."

"I must take the key, then, I suppose?"

"Key! my dear child, I never look anything. If your servants are honest, they will not steal things, however much they are left open. If they are not, they will find the way to rob you, however much you may try to circumvent them."

"Papa says it is wrong to put temptation in people's way."

"I do not agree with him. I like to trust people. If they betray that trust, I do not keep them under my roof. It would hurt my feelings if I were a servant to think my master or mistress thought it needful to turn a key upon everything against me. It would kill all the good in me, I am sure."

"I have never looked at it in that light before," said Mrs. Hilhouse, gently; "but I like your idea. We, however, have always locked everything. Mr. Hilhouse has strong views upon the point, but he means well by it, I am sure."

"Of course he does!" assented Mrs. Charlton; "we cannot all think alike."

Ellen Hilhouse soon returned with the objectionable spirit, and in a short time, the sick woman was lying relieved and refreshed by the treatment.

"How weak you are!" said Mrs. Charlton, regretfully. "Do you take champagne?"

"No! my dear; Dr. King wanted me to do so, but I am sure Mr. Hilhouse would not approve of it, and I know we have none in the house. You keep forgetting that we are teetotalers, and as such we ought not, of course, to uphold the use of stimulants in any form."

"That is all very well, dear friend, but even teetotalers must obey the doctor's orders. I shall speak to Dr. King."

"You are a darling!" whispered Nellie, as she showed her out.

"How can I ever thank you?" said Marion, earnestly.

"My dear, you have done me good," were the parting words of the invalid. "Will you come again?"

"That I will," returned the young widow, and kissed her.

Elsie Charlton was not a kissing woman at all, but some instinct drew her towards the poor sufferer lying so patiently before her; and the two clasped hands, each understanding it, as a compact of friendship.

That evening as she went home Mrs. Charlton called at the doctor's house.

"Well?" he asked. "Have you tamed him?"

"I think I have made a good beginning. He is going abroad. I have caused gin to be carried beneath his roof, and to-morrow I shall take champagne there. I have come to get an order from you for Mrs. Hilhouse to have it."

"And you think she will?"

"I am sure of it."

Dr. King regarded her for a few moments in silence, then broke out into laughter.

"I hope you will never have need to wheedle me," he said. "I should stand no chance at all! I thought our holy rector was quite beyond the influence of petticoats—even yours—but it seems I was wrong. Now, I could never say no to a woman myself—even when old and ugly. Poor souls! If you saw as much as I do of them, you would feel with me, that they have the worst of it in this world."

"Quite true; but then perhaps we shall have the best in the next."

"That does not coincide with the opinion of John Turk. He does not think there will be much of a heaven for you; you forget that we are the glory of God, but you are only the glory of man!"

"Well! I could make a remark; but perhaps I might be considered irreverent."

"That you always are. I should say, Mrs. Charlton, your bump of veneration is not largely developed."

"Bump of humbug, you mean, doctor," she laughed. "No! I never go in for that sort of thing; it is all very well for medical men; it pleases their patients; but for me, no thank you."

"Well, I like you," said Dr. King, with a merry laugh.

"That's not to be wondered at," she replied, saucily.

"So you really think me a humbug, that animal of all others I most detest. Now, is there any character more despicable?"

"Yes, one—the *honest bear*—the man who takes a pleasure in saying rude things, and making you uncomfortable; some doctors go in for that; they think if they let people see that they can afford to be rough, they will imagine they must be clever, or in some way very desirable. If a man *must* be untruthful, I would rather his lies were pleasant than otherwise; but, yet again, I would prefer to have my ears boxed than listen to unmeaning compliments. What vapid fools men must think us, to imagine them acceptable."

"I believe they do, many of them."

"And you agree with them, perhaps?"

"That women appreciate compliments? Well, yes; I do."

"It is a very odd thing," remarked Mrs. Charlton, quietly, "that when I come in contact with you I imagine I like you, and that I invariably go away thinking you a beast. So now, perhaps you will give me that order for which I came;" and Mrs. Charlton, who had been standing, flung herself down in an easy-chair, and taking up the newspaper, which lay upon the table, began to read.

Dr. King drew a blotting-pad towards him, a merry twinkle in his eye, and a twitch at the corners of his kindly mouth, and wrote what she desired; then he arose and stood before her.

"Mrs. Charlton!"

No reply; but the deep grey eyes remained fixed upon the columns of the paper.

"Mrs. Charlton, won't you speak to me?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Well, even though I am a doctor, and consequently a humbug, I cannot say you are sweet-tempered. Do lift your face to the looking-glass, and you won't know yourself; it is not becoming to be cross!" and Dr. King laughed heartily.

"Now tell me what you are thinking?" he continued, after a pause.

"That Solomon was right when he said that fools were known by their laughter," she replied, with a flash, half of anger, half mischief, from her beautiful eyes.

"Come, now, you have fired the last shot; I hold up the flag of truce," and he waved his white handkerchief above his head.

"Let us part the friends we really are," and he held out his hand to her.

She gave him a kindly glance, and taking it, said—

"Now give me the order, and let me go. I'll come and see your wife when I am in a better temper."

He accompanied her to the door, and watched her lithe form down the street.

"As good a woman as ever breathed," he ejaculated heartily; "and as true as steel. Has had her troubles, poor soul, or I'm very much mistaken; but she is not one to give her confidence freely—not very conventional in her views, but as good as she is beautiful. What a sweet, winning face it is. If I were twenty years younger, and had no wife I'd—"

"Well, John, under those circumstances what would you do?" asked a full, clear voice behind him, belonging to a plump, fresh-complexioned woman of about forty.

"My dear, I did not know you were so near," returned Dr. King, as he faced his wife.

"That is not answering my question," she said, smiling.

"True, and you might not like it if I did."

"Nevertheless, you are going to tell me."

"Very well. If I were twenty years younger and had no wife, I'd marry Mrs. Charlton."

"You would like to, I daresay, my dear, but you may rest assured she wouldn't take you."

"Why not? I'm not a bad sort of fellow; and twenty years ago you did not think me very ill-looking; now did you?"

"Nor do I now, John; and I am not going to be jealous of Elsie Charlton. I hope I have too much sense for that."

"Of course you have, Polly. You're the wisest little woman alive."

And shutting the door, he stooped and kissed her.

CHAPTER III.

MARKET GLENTON.

MARKET GLENTON was perhaps the most sleepy town in all England, and had been built for the most part before the *cacoethes buildendi* of the present lath and plaster age had begun; except in the outskirts, semi-detached villas and picturesque cottages, standing in their own gardens, were not to be found, and they were on the road leading to Clitheroe, some fifteen miles away.

Market Glenton was one long street of red brick residences and shops, stretching for over a mile from the commencement of the town to the above-named Clitheroe road.

There were back slums of course, but every place of business, and house of any importance, was situated in the street.

Upon entering the thoroughfare, the sheep market lay on the left-hand side, and almost opposite to it was a large building with an ugly square bay window projecting over the pavement, surmounted by a clock and a gabled roof; and the newness of the red bricks bespoke to the passer-by that this was among its latest improvements.

There was also a little pent-house affair over the door, in the midst of which might be seen printed in large letters "Town Hall."

Then, going up the main road, which was broadly edged on either side with hobble stones, you passed a long street of shops, none of them showing the sign of much custom.

The valentines, Christmas, New Year and Easter cards, placed in the fancy shop window, each, we may suppose in their proper seasons, remained there still, and there would remain, till the coming seasons should sell them, shabby as they were; for there were no better ones to be obtained in Market Glenton, and there was neither train, coach, nor omnibus to Clitheroe; only the carrier's cart, and the taste of carriers is scarcely to be trusted in such matters as cards and valentines. The "costumes" in the draper's shop were decidedly out of date, and often rather faded, and at times stained into the bargain, for the town lay in a valley, and the river Glen was its near neighbour, as its name betokens, and the banks of the Glen were disobligingly shallow, so that the lower part of the town was very often inundated when rain was abundant, or from other more abstruse reasons.

A chalk cow denoted the dairy, but neither fresh butter nor new laid eggs were shown in the window; in fact, the people of Market Glenton seemed to be all too lazy to do more than they could possibly avoid—perhaps they reserved their energies for market days. In the widest part of the street ran a second one parallel with it, ending in the red market-house, while on the right hand side, lying back from the road itself, was the beautiful old grey stone church, with its exquisitely fine and lofty spire, and the still older schools, which some three hundred years before had been erected for the children of the town, by

one who was forgotten, except in name, having belonged to that extensive family of Smiths, the identity of whose various members it is somewhat difficult to trace out and follow; while the rectory stood under the shadow of the church, and was the only residence which showed its garden to the outer world, and lay in that garden, a little retired from the street. The hotel, with its swinging sign of three stately swans, and the post-office, were the last tokens of business in the town, after which the hill began to ascend slightly, and comfortable houses of all sizes turned their flat red faces towards each other, with their windows looking out honestly upon the pavement. No green strip could have been seen before any of them; but behind, the high-walled gardens were large, and well-filled with fruit and flowers.

Here lived the only doctor, honest John King, and the people were too well satisfied with him to allow standing room for any one else. A young surgeon had once essayed to try his luck there, but he was very soon starved out, for "Honest John," as he was called by rich and poor, was so much beloved among them, that, while he lived, no other would be tolerated in their midst, and this made Dr. King's life a more than usually busy one.

The chemist's shop was the best in the place, for into that Dr. King had himself placed a very able man whom he could trust to prepare his medicines, &c., &c., one Mr. Brown.

A brass plate upon the door of one of the largest residences announced that Mr. Slowcombe, solicitor, lived within.

Now, Mr. Slowcombe had been born and bred in Market Glenton, and had lived there at intervals all his life—indeed, the greater part of his time, but he also had offices in London.

It was, however, not often that Mr. Slowcombe went to London now, for his son, a man of forty years of age, who was almost as much respected as his father, attended entirely to that part of the business, and the white-haired old attorney was left to enjoy the reputation he had earned among the people of Market Glenton.

One house further on lived his brother, Mr. Josias Slowcombe, the banker, and these two were so well-known and trusted, that they managed the whole of the secular affairs of the people of the town, both monetary and legal. Indeed, the Slowcombes were shining lights in Market Glenton, and the rector looked upon them as the very pillars of his church, and they were his churchwardens.

Some twelve doors on, could be found Mr. Hilhouse's "thorn in the flesh," the Reverend Ebenezer Blight, as the people called him; but to do the man justice, he styled himself plain Mr. —

Beside his unpretentious house was a still more unpretentious chapel of small dimensions, which he filled, almost painfully, with his stentorian voice; but more of Mr. Blight anon.

There were the houses of the banker's clerks and cashiers, and of the lawyer's clerks; of a few persons of independent means, and of the retired tradespeople, and these carried you to the top of the town, where, in the very centre, facing the main road, and lying between that running to Clitheroe, and another leading off to the little village of Nunshand, stood a really pretty and picturesque cottage orné, all covered with climbing plants, and surrounded by lawns, trees, flowers, and shrubberies. The owner had purchased it some twelve months before, upon her return from India, a recent widow, and had named it "The Nest." In those twelve months Mrs. Charlton had become known to every one in the place, and was a favourite with all. It was curious how eyes brightened when she approached.

Why she chose Market Glenton for her residence, perhaps, she could hardly have told you herself, but two reasons probably biased her.

First, it was in the midst of a good hunting county, and she dearly-loved to follow the

hounds; and, secondly, the parents of—shall we say her greatest friend? lived there—Mr. and Mrs. Hilhouse.

She may have wished to make their acquaintance for his sake; she may have thought that near his home, when he should return, she should see more of him. Had she arrived at Market Glenton on one of its sleepy days, it is quite possible that Elsie Charlton would have dreaded life in so stagnant a place, but as it chanced, an advertisement of the cottage took her there on a market day, and Market Glenton was full of life.

The main street was crowded with covered booths, as she drove through the town from the station, which had lately been built, and was some way from the town itself.

The scene was new to her, and pleased her.

In England she had not witnessed such a sight before; it reminded her of the foreign bazaars she had seen abroad. It was a perfect fair. Each booth was laid out with its varied stores, and the sellers were noisily and good-humouredly offering their incongruous wares.

There were meat-stalls, hung with the reddest of raw meat; bacon stalls, cheese stalls, stalls of tin goods, glistening as brightly as silver in the summer sunshine; stalls covered with a hundred sorts of confections and sweetstuff of every shape and make; book-stalls, and boot-stalls, stalls of many coloured draperies, stockings and wools of every shade. Stalls piled with rosy-cheeked apples, and fragrant pears, and purple plums, flanked by garden produce and vegetables of all sorts and descriptions. While, mingling with the cries of the vendors, might be heard the pious tones of the young man at a small Bible stall, who was a living sign-post to Celestial regions.

"This way to heaven for fourpence!" he cried again, and yet again, offering a small Testament to every passer-by.

This Bible stall, and this young man, was the one link between Mr. Hilhouse and Mr. Blight—the spot of neutral ground upon which the two could meet without serious consequences.

"Samuel Biggs," who kept the stall, was "a creature" to them both, and if either of them had any religiously dirty work to do Sam did it.

They both agreed that Samuel was a "very good young man," and had even clasped hands over his merits—both believed in him. Samuel Biggs went to church in the morning and to chapel in the evening, and suited his conversation to his company.

This was Samuel in his rusty black coat, with his grey knee'd trousers, his black tie, and very tall silk hat.

Samuel, out of those garments, cleaned boots and shoes for the two families of Slow-combes, got up their coals, and did any left-handed job which they wanted done; dirtier jobs by far than getting up the coals, morally speaking, sometimes, too.

There was never a funeral in the town at which Sam's rusty black might not be seen, surmounted by his sorrow, lantern-jawed face. Sam looked out for funerals, and often assisted the undertaker, even sometimes appearing as a mute before some mourner's door, his countenance a protest against the world and the things of the world. Yet there were those who whispered that Sam had convivial times in company with his whisky bottle in the secrecy of his single room and single blessedness; but, as Sam always looked the door, how could even his near neighbours know? And the curious eyes which peeped through cracks and keyholes might be mistaken, and the curious ears which acted the part of listeners were not to be trusted, especially as Sam always wore an enormous piece of blue ribbon tied in a bow in his button-hole.

With the voice of Samuel Biggs, appealing to the sinners passing by, mingled the bell of the town oriel, announcing the sale of sheep, which were penned in the huddle-stoned space before the town hall, where the white fleeced

creatures were being poked by the sticks of the farmers, and prodded, and felt, and pulled about by the reckless hands of would-be purchasers, and others who had nothing better to do than idle about and see what there was to be seen; while the patient animals huddled together unresistingly.

In looking on at such scenes one can but wonder what these poor dumb creatures think of the genus man, with his stick, and his kicks, and his oaths, and rough words!

What can these "beasts that perish" think of man, who was made "after the image of God?" But, then, that was some time ago, and time changes both things and people.

Another patient beast was on guard over a brightly painted caravan, or, more correctly speaking, under it—a watch dog, chained by the throat to the axle of the wheel; but it was not allowed to stay there long, the whole concern being warned off by the town authorities, which might have been supposed to be the fault of the poor dog, so cruelly was it kicked and cuffed by the irate gipsies, who dared not vent their spleen upon those important personages.

Mrs. Charlton was passing down the street in the station fly, and witnessed the scene. She looked at the half-starved collie, which really was well bred, with his pathetic eyes, and pulled the check string, beckoning to the master gipsy; but he was too much out of humour to take any notice of her, so she stepped lightly out, and stood before him.

"Is that dog yours?" she asked.

"Well, he ain't your'n, is he?" replied the man, insolently.

She raised her eyes full of wonder to his face, for people were seldom rude to her, and most men respect a widow's cap.

Her glance shamed him, but he would not give way to the better feeling it had awakened, and he tugged harshly at the rope by which the poor dog was tied, and abused him savagely for not coming.

"Don't you see that the cord is twisted?" said Mrs. Charlton, indignantly, stooping herself to disentangle it.

"You'll spoil your gloves," said the man, with rough sarcasm, "and I don't see what business it is of your'n!"

By this time the dog was free, and licked her hand in token of gratitude, while he looked up wistfully into her face.

"Poor fellow!" she said, "I'll help you if I can."

Then she turned to the gipsy, who was regarding her with a mixed feeling of anger and admiration—anger that she should dare to interfere in his affairs, and wonder that a lady so young and so beautiful should feel no fear in coming among their rough crew.

"That dog of yours is perhaps worth five shillings," she said, quietly; "but I have taken a fancy to him, and should like to buy him."

"Five shillings!" laughed the man. "If you'll give five pounds for him you shall have him."

For a moment only the widow hesitated, and the dog watched her with his head on one side, as if he were most deeply interested in the conversation, as perhaps he was. Then a memory came to her—a picture which Cecil Hilhouse had once shown her of an old favourite of his own, and somehow this dog reminded her of it.

She took her purse from her pocket, and from it extracted a crisp note, which she handed to the man. He simply stared at her in surprise; then, almost with shame, said,—

"He ain't much to look at, but he's a good 'un."

"If you have a knife," she answered, "cut that rope from his neck, he'll follow me."

The gipsy cut the dog free, and he stood for one moment looking into the faces of the two; then his new mistress called him, and he gazed at her wistfully, and crouched at the man's feet.

"Go on, can't you," he said, roughly, and with a bound he fawned on Mrs. Charlton.

"Take him up on the box coachman," she laughed; "my new purchase is not clean enough to come inside—but stay, no dog is proud of himself without a collar; where can I get one?"

They stopped at one of the stalls, and the dog wagged his tail, as though he appreciated the honour done him.

He followed closely at his mistress's heels, wherever she went—upstairs, downstairs, in house and garden, as though he were her shadow.

That was twelve months before the opening of this tale; since then a great many market days had come and gone.

Mrs. Charlton had long been settled at "The Nest," and she appeared to be gaining an influence for good over her rector.

It was fully decided that he was to take Mrs. Hilhouse abroad, but as a punishment for her want of proper respect and right feeling, as he termed it, Marion, his eldest daughter, was not to go with them, and a dreadful old she-dragon, Mr. Hilhouse's maiden sister, was to come and take charge of her and the house.

This news at first went a long way towards breaking the poor girl's heart, so upset was she; but Mrs. Charlton soon cheered her with promises of plenty of "fun" at "The Nest," and Marion began after awhile to think she would not have such a bad time of it after all; only she deeply regretted being separated from her mother, who she felt would sorely miss her ministrations. But Mrs. Hilhouse's health had so improved since Elsie Charlton had "read the Riot Act" at the Rectory, that there seemed no fear now of any immediate change for the worse.

Mrs. Charlton had sent a case of champagne to her friend—had silenced the rector's objections with the doctor's certificate, and had daily popped in to see that the wine was really drunk, and how those three poor women looked for her visits only they themselves knew; and always the collie, whom she had named "Trusty," lay down upon the doorstep and waited for her.

Even the last difficulty had been overcome; Mr. Hilhouse had heard of a curate.

He had rejected one after another for some valid or invalid reason, but now he was satisfied that he had found the right man.

Years before he had had a college friend, of the name of Gresham, a man holding his own views and opinions on most points. This friend was now dead, but he had left an only son, and Mr. Hilhouse had himself known this son when he was a little lad of twelve, quite afraid to claim his soul for his own, in the presence of his stern father.

Great, therefore, was the joy of the rector of Market Glenton, when by some side wind he learnt that Faulkner Gresham was seeking a curacy. He at once performed a mental calculation.

His friend had married before he had himself done so, and both had married early, and had thus put aside youthful follies.

His own son was eight-and-twenty. Faulkner must be at least thirty years old. A very reliable age indeed.

Mr. Hilhouse closed his eyes to contemplate Faulkner Gresham as he now must be. A mild, tractable young man, ready and willing to follow his rector's wishes upon all points.

While he was thinking of him, with quite a smile of contentment upon his lips, the postman knocked, and a letter was brought to him upon a small black tray. Mr. Hilhouse had plenty of silver salvers, but he wouldn't have them used.

They wouldn't wear out, to be sure, for they were honest silver, but the people about him, sad to say, were not all honest; and how could he tell that some of them; not having a perfect knowledge of the difference between *meum* and *tuum*, might not steal his salvers? So he locked them up, and shook his head to think that it was needful so to do, and that this was such a wicked world.

The letter was from a brother clergyman,

begging him to give his curacy to his son, who was a married man of twenty-seven, with a delicate wife and two young children.

The brother clergyman told him that he would find his son, George Parker, a hard-worker—that his heart was in his profession, and that it would be a real kindness to take him.

But Mr. Hilhouse had a reminiscence of a scene which had occurred at that father's house, say, quite twenty-two years before.

He had been one of several clergymen who had met at Mr. Parker's with reference to some missionary work, and one of them had given young George Parker two half-crowns.

Now, George Parker had been allowed, with his sister, to remain in the room and hear about the missions.

His sister, who was a year or two older than himself, was a pale, thoughtful child, and when the guests were gone, she went to her father's side and said,

"Papa, dear, I have a shilling! May I give it to the good missionaries?"

Her father was greatly pleased with his little daughter, held her the box, and she smiled when she heard her coin ring at the bottom. Then Mr. Parker kissed her.

"My child," he said, "always give freely to the Lord, and he will return your gift two-fold into your bosom," and he gave his daughter two shillings.

Now George had watched this scene with astonished eyes, first that his sister should give up her shilling, for it will be seen that master George, though a baptised Christian, and brought up by a good religious father in a Christian land, was yet a little heathen. Then his wonder deepened at his father's words, and more still when the interest on the money was so soon paid, and being a sharp boy, even at five years old, George Parker thought he would like to make a similar investment.

Mr. Hilhouse was present when he brought his two half-crowns, and dropped them into the box with quite a heavy thud.

Mr. Parker looked surprised, for George had never before shown any sign of grace; but he praised him nevertheless, telling him that he could not have done better with his money, and Mr. Hilhouse had patted him on the head approvingly.

George waited for his interest to be paid, as his sister's had been; but not a coin did Mr. Parker take from his pocket, and the boy grew very troubled in spirit.

All that evening poor little George sat apart in gloomy silence.

At length he talked to his sister about it. The little saint thought the matter over a long time—then suggested he had not put the money in with faith; and being too good for this wicked world, she died while still a child!

All night little George sobbed in his crib for his lost half-crowns.

The missionary box stood upon a bracket in the upper passage, just outside the spare-room door, and the early morning saw master George carry a light cane chair, and get that money-box down.

Upon the floor the boy sat, and sobbed over his lost treasure, bedewing the box with his tears; and with the jingle of the coins a great temptation came to him; he would try and get his money out. He did try, and by dint of much perseverance he abstracted, not one of his half-crowns—but a halfpenny, whereupon his wailing became so tremendous that Mr. Hilhouse awoke, and came out of his room to ascertain what was the cause of this disturbance at so early an hour.

The consequence of his discovery was, that little George Parker had a very sound flogging, and was kept in bed all day; nor was that all his punishment. Twenty-two years afterwards his sin found him out, for the remembrance of it decided Mr. Hilhouse not to take him for his curate, remarking sagely, "The boy is father to the man!"

(To be continued.)

TRUE AS THE STARS.

—O—

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOBERLY TEMPTED.

Rhoda hurried with quick, uncertain steps to her own room, and, when there, bolted the door. Why should she blush when there was no one to see? Why should her heart beat so tumultuously when there was no apparent cause for agitation? When Mason came, in a few minutes, to dress her young mistress, Rhoda felt as if she could not meet her eye. When she stood before the looking-glass she dared not look at her own fair reflection. It was a new sensation for the high-spirited girl to be ashamed of herself, though she had often taken the trouble to be ashamed of other people.

But was she ashamed? She had said nothing that she ought not to have said; in fact she had paid a visit to an invalid, and scarcely asked after his health. It was compassion that made her feel so odd when she first saw him—it was quite natural to be overcome when he looked so bad, as if he had been ill for months, although she did not know much of him—and he had certainly on one or two occasions been very rude to her—yet she could not be quite unconcerned, especially when he had got his fall in trying to save her from an insult.

Thus she battled with her conscience till she went down to dinner, with a flush on her cheeks and a light in her eyes, which made Percy Wyndham feel that his love-making had not been entirely a jest, and caused Lady Diana to be certain of the success of her experiment.

"I really am so busy that I must constitute you Captain Dormer's daily visitor!" she said in a low voice to Rhoda Macdonald another day, as soon as they were back in the drawing-room.

"Oh, no—no!" with a frightened air.

"What, is it too dangerous?" a sneer curving her lips.

"Certainly not!" a rose-tint rushing over the pearly whiteness of her neck.

"Then go to him now with a bunch of grapes. It is cruel to leave him to the tender mercies of Mrs. Nicholls."

"Won't Miss Patterson?" with an appealing look in Kitty's direction.

"No! she would set his nerves on edge; her voice is too loud. Are you afraid that Percy will be jealous or that Captain Dormer will think you really care for him?"

Rhoda went slowly, and was glad to find the cheery housekeeper in attendance. But Mrs. Nicholls bustled out of the room before she could stop her, saying she must really go down to her supper, and left the two alone in the dangerous silence.

"I've brought you some grapes!" she said softly, and wondered why her voice refused to be steady.

"How good you are to me!" and then he shaded his eyes and looked up at her, half dazzled. Was there ever a beauty on earth to compare with hers—ever a whiter neck or a daintier head or a face that could sooner make you forget discomfort, pain, and almost horror!

Again there was silence, but oh! such silence as said much more than speech, for the roses were rising and falling on her breast, moved by the wild beating of her heart, and she could hear his long-drawn breaths. He was fighting hard against temptation, but the struggle was difficult when his strength had gone from him. He thought of Douglas Yelverton—the friend who trusted him—and the thought maddened him. But he remembered that his love was like the wind, always moving from one quarter to another—that even now he was still engaged to Lady Diana; and he wondered if he were bound in honour to keep this girl for him, when he was so

careless of her! In the torment of conflicting feeling a groan burst from his lips.

"Are you in pain?" she asked quickly, her womanly compassion aroused in an instant.

"Yes! there is some can de Cologne in that saucer over there. Mrs. Nicholls has been bathing my head with it," he said craftily, and a minute later was thrilling under the touch of her gentle fingers, as she dipped her handkerchief in it and laid it across his forehead.

No one could tell what a trial it was to him to lie still and take it all with apparent calmness. True to his own better self and to his friend, he bit his lips, as words seemed to form themselves on his tongue—words such as neither could ever have forgotten if they had once been spoken, but he kept them back bravely, and only let his eyes speak, because a power that was stronger than his will seemed to have got the mastery over him. But they were powerless to do any harm, because she was striving to do what was right as well as he, and she would not meet them.

And then, after a few questions about his health, she went away, and when the door was closed between them, leant against the wall, as if she were out of breath.

Day after day she came, sent with some message from Lady Diana, and all the world might have heard the words that passed between them, for each was keeping a strict check on the inner, tortured self; but as the month wore to the end a change came over over Rhoda's expression—a change that puzzled Percy Wyndham, and made him rack his brain to find the reason. The happy, childlike smile had gone from the pretty lips. A strange wistfulness had come into the serious eyes—a wistfulness that changed sometimes into the hunted expression of an animal that is driven to bay.

Percy had altered his tone directly the Society which worked such mischief was dissolved, and addressed her always as "Miss Macdonald," and treated her with the deference it was his wont to show to all ladies; but he saw for himself that he was not making way, and he began to fancy that his own happiness was involved in the matter.

Lady Diana, instead of throwing them together, managed to keep them continually apart, because she began to fear lest her volatile cousin should spoil sport.

Meanwhile Dormer's health improved, and the doctor recommended a daily drive, in hopes that the fresh air might help him to sleep better. Not being behind the scenes, he could not imagine why his patient should pass such sleepless nights, and be so feverish in the morning.

The prescription might have answered better if Lady Diana had not insisted upon Rhoda's driving him about in her elegant little pony-carriage.

"I would not trust my ponies with any of the other girls," she said plausibly; "but you drive so splendidly that I know you won't let them break their knees or run away; and you could not have the cruelty to send him out with a groom!"

"Mr. Wyndham is so good-natured—"

"Yes, he will do anything for a pretty girl, but for a man it's different. If you were likely to fall in love with Captain Dormer of course I would not ask you to go," looking straight into the troubled face. "Say, if there's any danger."

"As if there could be!" with infinite scorn.

Could there possibly be danger from any quarter when she had vowed to be true to Douglas Yelverton till death did them part?

Side by side they drove through the leafy lanes, and not a word of tenderness was spoken by either. Gravely they talked about the affairs of the day or reminiscences from the soldier's life; discussed the rival merits of the ponies, or pointed out the beauties of the view.

But Lady Diana had planned it cleverly, for every day they were alone together, and there

was a charm in those sunny afternoons against which Rhoda was fighting with all her strength, whilst to Dormer the temptation grew almost maddening. He had seen an envelope in Yelverton's handwriting addressed to Lady Diana, therefore he knew that he was playing a double game still, in defiance of his own pledged word.

"He cannot marry them both," he would cry fiercely in the long watches of the night. "For Heaven's sake, let him give up one or the other."

A delicious doubt was creeping over him concerning Rhoda's feelings. If she did not care for him why did she take care never to touch his hand as she stepped into the carriage? Why did she keep her eyes steadily averted, and never let them meet his glance? Why did that rose-flush come and go so sweetly on the softness of her cheeks?

Only a little while ago he had said to her the bitterest words that he had ever spoken to a woman—only a little while ago he had thought her conduct culpable, even disgraceful; but oh! what a change the last few weeks had worked, altering that forced dislike which never had been genuine into a passion that was more to him than his life.

With this constant association, the strain was growing more than he could bear. He felt that come what would he must put an end to it—safeguard his honour; and, if fate was merciful to him, secure his love. He would not speak when they were miles away from everybody, for he was afraid of what he might do or say. But he would make an opportunity that evening, when he was to appear in the drawing-room for an hour or two for the first time since his accident.

As he entered the room, Rhoda was dancing with Lord Faulkner, and apparently enjoying herself very much, for she had only time to cast one quick glance in his direction, whilst everyone else streamed up to him as soon as the dance was over, and congratulated him on his recovery.

No longer with one partner alone, she danced with every available man in the room, and her low, sweet laugh sounded joyously in Dormer's jealous ears.

"I don't think you ought to stay much longer," said Lady Diana, kindly. "You must not do yourself up."

"The room is very hot!" passing his hand over his forehead. "I'll just go and take a turn on the terrace!"

She passed a compassionate glance at his white face.

"If you see Percy, will you tell him that I want to speak to him!" she said, artfully, knowing by whose side her cousin was most likely to be.

Captain Dormer stepped out into the fresh, sweet air, and looking up and down the twilight terrace soon saw a girl's figure, dressed in white, leaning on the ivy-covered balustrade, with Wyndham by her side. He walked straight up to them, and delivered his message.

Percy looked annoyed. "I will be back in half a minute," he said, and went off, leaving the two together.

What was it that made Rhoda look round with a frightened air, as if she wished to run away?

"Miss Macdonald!" Dormer began, gravely, and the tone seemed to quiet her nerves. "I am going to write to Yelverton! What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him!" her voice trembled so that she could hardly speak, as she thought of the vows she had taken and strove so desperately to keep straight. "Tell him to break with Lady Diana!"

To break with Lady Diana! Then she did not want to be free, and her love for himself was a delusion! His very lips grew white with the shock of the disappointment.

"You mean that will be best for your own happiness?" he said, hoarsely.

"Happiness! oh, Heaven!" with a bitter appeal to the stars. "It is gone!"

"Till Yelverton comes back," in a low voice.

"Yes, till he comes back," she repeated, mechanically.

"Shall I tell him he must choose between you?" hoping against hope.

"No, that would seem a mockery." She was playing with a rose; but her fingers shook so that it fell at his feet.

He stooped and picked it up.

"Give it me back," she said, quickly. "I did not mean it for you!"

"Do you grudge me even a flower?" as he held it out to her.

"Good-night!" She bent her head, and vanished down the steps into the fragrant darkness, with her hand on her throbbing heart, and looked wildly round as if for escape—escape from him, or from herself?

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DANGERS THICKEN.

"I WILL go home to-morrow," said Rhoda Macdonald to herself, making her way down the dusky paths in hottest haste, as if an enemy were at her heels. "I don't care if I catch the fever. I don't care if I die. Anything on earth would be better than this!"

She truly thought there was no further chance of happiness for her. How could she honour her husband when she saw a letter in his handwriting directed to Lady Diana? watched her whilst she read it openly by the breakfast-table, and knew by the smile on her face, that it only contained honied words; and not a hint about the rupture of their engagement? How could she believe in his love or his word of honour, when he had frittered away the one on every side, and broken his other too evidently on more than one occasion? How could she ever trust him again, when he had ceased to write to her—his wife, and directed his correspondence to the woman to whom he was still engaged? Yes, she must fly from the place as if the cholera or some other pestilence had broken out amongst the cheerful, careless circle at the Castle, and there was no other home for her but Sumner Lodge.

"At last I have found you!" said a voice which sent a thrill of disgust through every pulse of her body, and only a few paces from her in the middle of the path stood Edward Staveley!

"Where have you come from?" she asked, stepping back—instead of forward, her eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"I was tired of waiting for you, so I thought I would come and look after you," he said, nervously. "When are you coming back?"

The question at once stopped all wish for a return to Sumner Lodge.

"I—I don't know," she said, hesitatingly.

"Have you taken root here?" he asked, roughly.

"No; but my friends are kind enough to wish to keep me," with quiet dignity.

"Which friends, Faulkner or Dormer? One or the other must be the attraction?"

"What do you mean by prowling about in Lord Lochleven's garden as if you were a thief?"

"I came to ask you a question. If I hadn't caught you to-night I should have called to-morrow. Now, Rhoda," his voice changing, "don't be hard on me. I can't get on without you. By Heaven! I can't."

"So sorry. Ask Virginia what you had better do," softly, as if there were no mockery in the words.

"I ask you—Rhoda; you know I'm mad about you, that's the truth! Will you have me?" holding out his hands, and catching hold of hers before she could prevent it. "Will you take me, darling, and make me the happiest man on earth?"

"How dare you ask me!" flushing crimson, and struggling to free herself.

"It's not my fault. You came too late, after I had asked Virginia, and nothing would induce me to marry her now," his eye-glass falling out of his eye in his excitement.

"Then go to her, and tell her so honourably. Oh! how I hate and loathe such vile deceit!" her whole heart in her tone.

"You oughtn't to. Think of your own game with Yelverton; but I'll forgive all that, if you will only do what you ask me. I've planned it all so well. I can stay down here for the fishing, and we can have our banns put up in the large church on the hill, where none of these people go, though it's the parish church; and then one day you can slip out without saying anything to a soul; and when we are married we'll start for Paris."

"Are you mad?" wrenching herself from his grasp. "If you weren't pledged to my own cousin do you think anything on earth would induce me to do it?"

"You might do worse," moodily. "There's not a single mortgage on the estate, and I'd let you spend like a queen!"

"You are very good, but money is not my idol," sweeping a low curtsy on the smooth gravel.

"I don't care a hang—marry me you must! I know too much about you to be cast off like an old dress!" his eyes glittering.

"Do your worst!" throwing back her head. "Nothing could be so bad as marriage with Mr. Staveley!"

"Rhoda, it's your last chance," with a deep breath: "Is it to be 'yes' or 'no'?"

"No! a thousand times! I wish I could put it stronger!" her chest heaving with the fire of her wrath.

"You needn't say anything more," drawing in his thin lips. "I've warned you, but you won't be warned! You are in my power, and I'll drag down your infernal pride in the dust! When you haven't a hole to hide your head in, then you may wish you were mistress of the Hall. Good evening, and pleasant dreams." With a mocking bow he walked off, and she stood rooted to the spot, too angry as yet to be afraid.

Were all men like this, she wondered, all heedless of their solemn pledges, all careless of everything but the desire of the moment?

Then her thoughts flew to one whom she knew to be of nobler stuff than that, whose word either man or woman could trust like a bond; who would bear his honour stainless through the fire of temptation, even if his heart were worn out in the struggle, and a glow seemed to spread over neck and brow, and her face was hidden in her hands.

"Oh, Douglas! Douglas! why could not you be more like your friend, a staff to cling to, a rock to lean against, a tower of defence?"

Could she help comparing the two together to the disadvantage of the other? She knew but very little of Captain Yelverton when he hurried her into a secret marriage, and before she could be certain whether she loved him or not he was torn from her side.

All she knew of him since was that he was forcing her into a life of deceit, whilst he had not the courage or the common honesty to break an engagement made void by his marriage.

She had never been thrown into close contact with him as she was with Frank Dormer—finding new virtues in him day after day—and a pleasant agreement of tastes.

Her husband was almost a stranger to her. She knew nothing of his views of life, his ways of thought, his temper or disposition, whilst the other was like an old friend whom she had had time to study at her leisure.

"Rhoda, is that you?" and Lord Faulkner came down the path with a cigarette between his lips. He took it out of his mouth, and put his arm round her, drawing her to his side, and looking down into her face, every line of which he could see clearly in the moonlight. "Wyndham's nearly in a fit, because you had gone off to bed, as he thought, without wishing him good-night; but I'm glad I've found you, I want to speak to you."

Wouldn't he give his head to be your cousin as I am?" stooping his own to kiss her.

"I wish you wouldn't!" angrily.

"Nonsense, cousins are just like brothers. Make up your mind to that before we go any further. And now tell me the truth—how much or how little did you know of Yelverton?"

She started convulsively; he saw it, and smiled.

"What is it to you?" she asked, evasively.

"It may be everything or nothing. You were very fond of him when I first saw you at Summer Lodge. Don't turn away. I know you are blushing to the roots of your hair. You actually fainted when you heard he was engaged to Lady Diana!"

"Don't, don't!" shaking from head to foot.

"He made love to you, of course. Tell me, did he propose to you?"

No answer, but he put his hand under her chin and turned up her face so that he could study every expression. It was torture to her, and she felt as if she could sink into the earth.

"I heard a story of a little girl who was foolish enough to go over with him to the Island." Was it his fancy, or did her face go deathly white? "It was a risky thing to do with a fast, good-looking fellow, and enough to make your aunt's hair turn as white as a sheet; but she shall never know it if you'll confess that it was you!"

"I won't tell you anything!" stamping her foot passionately, and trying to free herself; but a delicate greyhound might just as well have tried to get away from the grasp of an elephant.

"Did he—did he—humph—propose to you?" wondering in his own mind, if the fellow had dared to ask her to run away with him; but not liking to put it in broad English.

"I will tell you nothing. Let me go!"

"It would be wiser to make a friend of me," speaking very slowly, and watching her closely. "I wouldn't scold you, child, whatever you did. Your goings on lately have been rather eccentric; but I've not interfered, and when the other fellows began to chaff about Dormer I shut them up!"

Oh! how every word made her wince like the stroke of a dagger! The men had begun to talk of her and Captain Dormer! Could any humiliation be greater? Was there no hole where she could hide her head for ever?

"I shall go over to the Island and find out for myself, as you won't tell me," he said, crossly. "I should be pleasanter as a friend than a foe, and you're rather more of the latter than the first. Lady Di hates you like poison, Virginia's no better. It goes hardly with a girl when all the men are for her, and all the women against." His heart smote him as he said it, for she looked so pure and sweetly innocent with the tears on her long lashes, the tremble on her pretty lips. "I didn't mean it, little one, indeed I didn't, and I'll stand by you, of course, through thick and thin," he called out hastily, in sudden compunction.

"What a brute I've been!" he muttered to himself, as unable to bear any more, wounded, frightened and crushed, she burst into tears.

Then all the better instincts of his nature were aroused, and he tried his best to atone for his roughness. He begged her to forgive him. He swore that he thought her the dearest little thing in existence; and as he wiped her tears away with his own handkerchief he thanked his stars that he had the privilege to touch her soft cheek with his dark moustaches, for were they not kith and kin, of the same race, and the same blood?

She shrank from him instinctively, which only added to her charm, for as he said to himself, it was only nice girls who were ever afraid of him; but when she blushed and looked so shy, he wondered if she could possibly be the girl whom Yelverton had decoyed from her home.

He would have given half his fortune if he

could have proved something against him; but to do him justice, it would have shocked him inexpressibly to find that Rhoda MacDonald had been his victim.

As they walked together in silence up to the Castle, he was revolving many plans in his curious mind.

The moonlight fell softly on the large white blossoms of a magnolia, touching them daintily like a mother's kiss on a babe's cheek, and the shadows were dark and mysterious under the far-spreading branches of the ancient cedars, as the future just then was looking to a girl's wistful eyes. The gardens were still and dreamlike, with no sound to be heard but the flutter of a bird on the wing, or the splash of a fountain. There was peace on earth, in the air, in the deep, dark vaults overhead, everywhere it seemed to her fancy, except in her own troubled self.

Lord Faulkner, as he bade her good-night out there in the cool, calm night, looked down at her kindly and said,—

"Never defy me, child, I'm a devil if I'm rubbed the wrong way, and yet I want to be good to you."

"And I—I only wish to be let alone," the sentence broken by a sigh.

"No other wish than that?"

"Yes, one," raising her earnest face to the unresponsive sky, "that I might die to-night."

Before he could recover from his shocked surprise she was gone—and he was left alone to his cogitations.

Whilst the invalid was supposed to be enjoying the rest he sorely needed, he was busily occupied in writing a long letter on thin foreign paper. His face was whiter than the paper he was writing on; the heavy dew, caused by over exertion in weakness stood out on his forehead, as he implored Douglas Yelverton to be true to himself, and no longer to trifle with his duty.

"For Heaven's sake, break with one of them, and cleave to the one you love best!"

That was what he said, with no apparent bias either way in his noble unselfishness, keeping himself out of sight, and striving for his friend's happiness instead of his own. It was late when he put it in its envelope, and lay down to rest, exhausted in body, but relieved in mind.

(To be continued.)

ROYAL'S PROMISE.

—X—

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY sat alone together, the two girls, who a week before had been in all things equal; who seven days before had been as free from responsibility, as ignorant of life's tragedies, as little children. They loved each other still—more dearly, perhaps, than ever—but between them now a great gulf yawned. One was still free and unfettered, the other had taken a solemn oath, which bound her for all time to a husband who did not love her.

It was strange to see how this great difference in their fates had reversed their bearing to each other. In other days Phyllis had leant on Nell—the bright-eyed, mischief-loving damsel, who seemed so utterly unsuited to life in a Sisterhood—had clung to the grave-faced, thoughtful maiden, who was regarded by the community as a model "worker." Nell had dragged pretty Phyllis out of a dozen little innocent scrapes. Nell had kept her friend's love of fear under sufficiently to save her from dismissal from St. Hilda's; she had taken her part when complaints as to her conduct beyond the house were brought to Sister Ida; had defended her from the mischief-making matrons of Blakealgh, who were fond of coming up to St. Hilda's and telling the Superior odd little complaints of Miss Ward, such as she was giddy, she was too pretty for her position, or—oh! worst offence of all—she encouraged men to look at her.

Yes! The time in which Nell protected Phyllis was over, and pretty winsome Phyllis seemed now the consoler and comforter of her friend; albeit she appeared to be very angry with her, since kind words only increased the poor girl's sobs.

Miss Ward was trying what a little playful scolding would accomplish. Her bright eyes were bent on Nell so lovingly that no one in the world could have doubted her real sympathy, although it seemed best to her just now to play the part of mentor.

"I have no patience with you, Lady Charteris," pursued Phyllis gravely. "I presume you married Sir Royal to save his life; and now, because the most unquestionable proofs of his innocence have turned up, because no creature in their senses could ever doubt him again, and Lord Delamere assures you he will be here this afternoon, you are actually crying! I feel ashamed of you, Nell!"

"I can't help it, Phyllis!"

"But what is it you do want?" persisted Phyllis. "Since your husband's freedom doesn't satisfy you, Nell, tell me what troubles you?"

"You will only laugh!"

"I won't, I promise!"

"Don't you see!" said Nell, wistfully, "the gipsy girl has been found. The watch has turned up; by four o'clock Sir Royal will be free from suspicion. People will forget all this terrible charge, and he will be as respected as before—before Monday."

"And don't you want him to be respected? Do you know, Nell, it was a very noble thing of you to marry him while he was under a cloud, but surely you are selfish not to be glad the cloud is lifted."

"But I am of no use to him now! Phyllis, why won't you understand. Sir Reginald does not love me; he married me just to spare me from giving evidence against him."

Phyllis softened just a little.

"But, dear, he never professed to love you, and yet you seemed content!"

"I was content while I thought the marriage had saved his life; but now—" she broke off suddenly, and burst into tears.

"Don't," said Phyllis, soothingly; "no man in the world is worth it, dear! You're not the first couple who have married without love, and take my word for it, you won't be the last."

"That doesn't make it any better!"

"It ought to. Sir Royal knew what he was doing perfectly. He took the risk of chance, proving his marriage unnecessary. To my mind you ought to be very glad. You have been relieved from a lot of love-making."

"Phyllis!"

"And you were married without any fuss or bother, and you've escaped from St. Hilda's."

"I never wanted to escape!"

"All people are not spiteful to you. I declare, Nell, you are a very fortunate girl!"

"Can't you see why I am sorry," cried Nell, bitterly. "I am a burden on a man who doesn't care two straws for me—an unknown, penniless orphan. I have married the best parti in the county."

"So much the better for you."

"He thought it a sacrifice, I know," went on Nell. "I seemed to hear it in every tone of his voice, even while it was to save his life; and now when he finds he need never have done it at all, he will hate me."

"He won't have a chance of seeing you if go on like this. You are hardly recognizable now you have cried so much."

"But what am I to do?"

Phyllis stooped and kissed her. There was something in the hopeless sadness of the appeal which touched her to the heart.

"I should say be yourself and make the best of it; it can't be undone now, you know."

"And if he hates me!"

"Oh, he won't do that. No one could hate you, Nell, and if only you are wise, I prophecy in a little while he will be over head and ears in love with you."

"Phyll."

"Why not?" returned Phyllis. "Of course, if you go and beg his pardon for having married him (which I know you are longing to do) he will begin to think himself a very injured young man, and probably dislike you as much as you expect. You must take a high hand, dear, it's the only way; let him see you consider yourself the injured party, and that what he thinks of you is a matter of the supremest indifference to you."

"But it isn't."

"Then act as though it were. If you go on persuading yourself he is very much to be pitied, he'll end by believing it too. Start from the first as though he was the obliged party, and not you."

Nell gave a weary little sigh.

"You would do it so much better than me, dear. I have no idea how to begin."

"What a pity I am not Lady Charteris!" But Nell did not echo this sentiment. She only clung closer to her friend.

"He will be here by four o'clock, and Edwin is coming to-morrow to introduce himself as my cousin. But, oh, Phyllis! what shall we do this evening. It will be endless. I shall not have a word to say to him."

"I'll talk," said Phyllis, reassuringly. "I wish we had some evening dresses. I can't make you look in the least like a bride. One thing, Nell, we need not wear caps, which, in itself, is an untold relief. I curled my fringe last night just for the pleasure of feeling I was not at St. Hilda's. I hope it won't enter into Sir Royal's head to imagine we require a chaperone; but of course not. You are a married lady, Nell. Shall I stay or go when he comes?"

"Stay," pleaded Nell, "I can't be alone with him, or I shall begin to cry."

Mrs. Carter came up presently full of congratulations. All was well; Sir Royal had been unanimously acquitted. The whole bench had almost apologized to him for his unjust arrest. The gipsy girl and Popsy gave evidence which must have convinced the most sceptical, and, in fact, Sir Royal was the hero of the hour. He was to lunch at Blakesleigh, but he would be home to dinner at seven, and she (Mrs. Carter) wished to know if her ladyship and Miss Ward would dine there also. Lady Charteris would hardly care to drive to meet Sir Royal; it would be much pleasanter for her to wait for him at home.

Nell agreed at once.

The housekeeper and Phyllis had the arrangements to themselves, for the Lady of Charteris had no spirits for discussion.

Phyllis, on the contrary, entered into things with a zest which delighted the old housekeeper; and perhaps in her heart made the good woman regret this bright-eyed creature had not been the mistress sent by fate to rule at Marden.

Phyllis followed her out of the room.

There was something she wanted to say which she could not utter in Nell's presence.

"Mrs. Carter, you have known Sir Royal a long time; will he be good to her? She is such a tender creature I think she would break her heart if she saw he regretted their hurried marriage."

"Don't fash yourself, missie," was the prompt reply. "Sir Royal's not the man to be unkind to any woman, much less one that bears his name. He'll be good to her right enough; and as there's never been any talk of his fancying any young lady before I should say he'd soon grow fond of his wife. She's a pretty young creature enough; and he'd never find it in his heart to make her feel he was sorry they hurried on things so."

Phyllis had another question.

"Is Sir Royal coming alone?"

"Why no, missie. Dr. White is with him, and I believe Mr. and Mrs. Drake will come to dinner. My lady has no mother, you see, to be with her, and it would seem strange for a bit of a thing like her to be alone without a lady to see to her."

"She has me!"

Mrs. Carter laughed.

"And you're nearly as much a child as she is. No, no, missie; Mrs. Drake's no great favourite of mine, but it's best she should come."

"I hate her," said Phyllis, frankly; "and how the dear old Vicar can put up with her, why, I can't imagine. She orders him about as though he were a boy."

"She's a good bit older you see, missie. She's the Vicar's stepmother, and as she's no children of her own he couldn't do less than see to her."

"Well, don't let her see Nell—I mean Lady Charteris—before Sir Royal arrives home. She would frighten her to death."

"It's all settled, Nell!" said Phyllis, when she got back to her friend. "We're to have dinner at seven, and you'll sit at the head of your own table. Mr. and Mrs. Drake are coming too, to look after us, I suppose. Dr. White must take care of her while I carry on a strong flirtation with her son. I must do it if it's only to plague her; you know she's always telling Sister horrid little tales about me."

"Which, sometimes, turn out to be true," said Nell, simply. "Phyllis, be careful to-night."

"I shall behave like a female Solon. Of course I shall be kind and attentive to the Vicar; as my spiritual pastor it's my duty to be, but I won't even look at any other gentleman. Mrs. Drake will monopolise the doctor with accounts of her 'bad nights,' and Sir Royal shall have undisturbed possession of his wife."

As Phyllis had already said, they could not make any very grand toilet, but the dresses they wore on Sunday at the Home were black grenadine, soft and flowing, and with a little lace tacked on to the neck and sleeves the effect was charming. Then Phyllis coaxed Mrs. Carter into a turn round the gardens, and came home with a bunch of scarlet geranium and a knot of soft, creamy roses. The first she meant to wear herself, the other she fastened lovingly at Nell's throat.

"You look just like a picture!" she said, kissing her. "I had no idea how nice you were before! I feel quite sure Sir Royal will rejoice in his late misfortunes since they have given him such a dear little wife!"

"He can't think," and Nell blushed crimson as she put the question, "he can't think I wanted to marry him—can he, Phyllis?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said Phyllis, with great decision. "He will probably think you regard the matter as a great nuisance, especially if you follow my advice, and treat him to a severe course of snubbing, my dear."

They went downstairs together. It wanted a quarter to seven, and Phyllis had a fear that old Mrs. Drake, who was always ultra-punctual, could not be far off. The library door stood open. It was a long, lofty room, and so much larger than Sir Royal appreciated that he had one end furnished as a private study, and screened from the library itself by heavy velvet curtains.

All the long French windows opened on to a verandah, so that he often came out of the study without dividing the heavy curtains which secured his privacy. The arrangement was quite new, and was not favoured by Mrs. Carter, who declared there was something uncanny in curtains. Windows and doors, the good woman declared, she could understand. You could look one and bolt the other; but how anyone could set far into the night in a room only defended by curtains was a wonder to her!

Phyllis and little Nell, however, were unconscious of Mrs. Carter's prejudices. To them the library, with its stained windows and carved oak furniture, seemed a charming room. Two of the windows were open, and from the verandah came the scent of tea roses and jasmine.

"I like this better than any room we have seen, Nell! Oh, I hope the Sisters won't send for me to-night. I should so like to stay till

to-morrow, and get Mrs. Carter to take me all over the house! I couldn't ask her before, you know; there seemed something unfeeling in caring for sight-seeing while Sir Royal was in danger."

"Don't go!" pleaded Nell, for Phyllis had gradually approached the door, and now held it in her hand. "Don't leave me! oh, please stay!"

"I must go," said practical Phyllis, "or you will have Mrs. Drake in here lecturing you. The housekeeper and I have planned it all. I am to meet Sir Royal and tell him where to find you; then I shall repair to the drawing-room, and set there in grand state until the advent of Mrs. Drake. You know how cordially she detests me, and how thoroughly the sentiment is returned, so you need not envy me the next quarter of an hour." Then, her tone changing as though by magic to one of great feeling, she whispered, "Be brave, Nell! Remember how you used to extol Sir Royal as a hero. After dreaming of him as an ideal knight all these months it can't be very terrible to meet him in the flesh."

Phyllis sped away. Truth to say, the unsatisfactory "worker" of St. Hilda's was enjoying herself very much indeed.

Phyllis was made for society. She loved pretty things and bright conversations—in fact, she had all the gifts that make a girl popular in the world. How she ever came to leave the world for a time (or profess to) and immerse herself at St. Hilda's nobody knew.

Certainly she had no vocation for such a life; perhaps a fit of morbid anxiety on her mother's part had had most to do with it.

Mrs. Ward was a woman much given to fancies; possessing many daughters and a husband whose income died with him, and was too small to admit of savings. Perhaps, poor woman, it was but natural she should wrong over her girls.

Phyllis specially troubled her; the others were ordinary, good-tempered creatures, who would have been delighted at the idea of wearing a wedding-ring, that they would honestly have fallen in love with whoever offered them the chance of such a trinket.

Phyllis was very different; in spite of her merry ways and bantering talk she was a little bit hard to please. She had refused one man whom Mrs. Ward would have been glad to call her son-in-law.

It was hardly fair on the other girls. Phyllis was so much more attractive that she quite outshone her sisters. She was, as one of them said crossly, uncommonly like the dog in the manger—she did not choose to marry herself, but she prevented their doing so.

There was quite a stormy scene. Phyllis declared she would go away, if she had to beg her bread.

Mrs. Ward said that was not necessary; there were many spheres now-a-days where a gentleman would be thankfully received.

Unluckily, these "spheres" narrowed themselves considerably when Phyllis wished them mentioned. The mother confessed her girl was too independent to become a resident governess, even had she the needful acquirements; she had been too spoilt to fall kindly into the position. The same remark applied still more forcibly to the position of companion.

At last, Mrs. Ward's dearest friend, who was distantly related to the Bishop's wife, told her of St. Hilda's. Sister Ida was written to, and professed herself willing to give Miss Ward a trial; and Phyllis, before she could look round, found herself at Marton a "worker" in the Sisterhood, with the understanding that everything—even to postage stamps—was found her, and that she would remain three years.

It seemed an eternity to Phyllis. Even the younger Sisters took hope, for in thirty-six months surely some of the seven could succeed in securing a partner for life!

They missed Phyllis at every turn, but then they hoped it was for her good. It must be

greatly to her advantage to spend three years with such holy women as the ladies of St. Hilda. Perhaps, too, she would become so impressed by their example as herself to wish to take the veil. They were honestly fond of Phyllis; but I fear they would not greatly have regretted this contingency, since it would have prevented her for ever from again spoiling their little prospects.

Phyllis was not precisely miserable at St. Hilda's. She had such an intense capacity for enjoyment that she found a good deal to amuse her, even in the monotonous household. Still, certainly, she was not in her element; and in spite of as many scrapes as she could get into, time did pass rather slowly, and so the excitement of the "Marion Murder," Nell's wedding, and her own visit to the Hall combined, had really been quite a godsend to her.

She looked a veritable sunbeam as she came downstairs, and Mrs. Carter, meeting her at the drawing room door, felt that some regret that she was not in Nell's place, which has before been mentioned.

"Five minutes to seven," cried Phyllis. "I do feel so hungry! Mrs. Carter, I hope dinner will be punctual, or I shall be starved!"

"Bless your heart, Miss Ward, the dinner 'll be punctual if the people are. I was just going down to the hall to ask if they were in sight; but that's wheels, I'm sure."

And wheels it proved to be, the Vicar driving his stepmother in a little pony carriage.

To say that old Mrs. Drake looked disappointed when she recognized Phyllis would be a very faint description of her sentiments. Her nose took a heavenward direction, the corners of her mouth went down, and she sniffed as though taken suddenly with a bad cold, while the Vicar said kindly—

"I am very glad to see you, Miss Ward, I am sure you have taken good care of Lady Charteris!"

"I have done my best," said Phyllis, demurely. Then turning to her enemy, "Will you let me take you upstairs, Mrs. Drake, as Lady Charteris is expecting her husband, and so cannot go with you herself."

"Her husband!"—here Mrs. Drake indulged in another sniff. "A pretty thing, indeed, for a charity child like her to come into such a thing!"

"Don't charity children ever have husbands?" asked Phyllis, innocently. "But Nell is not a charity child, Mrs. Drake. Her board and lodging have been regularly paid for. She is not even one of the 'all found,' like me!"

Mrs. Drake muttered an amiable little speech about the young lady's state more nearly resembling the lost ones than the found, but Phyllis took it with perfect good humour.

"I didn't mean my soul," she said, frankly, "but my body. St. Hilda's provides me with food and clothing. It even," with a burst of confidence, "washes me and stamps me!"

Mrs. Drake would have liked to stamp on Phyllis literally, instead of merely providing her postal needs, which had been the meaning of her rather odd expression.

"I am sure you do them credit," said the Vicar affably. "And now, mamma," to the terrible old woman, "you had really better accept this young lady's kind offer, and go upstairs to take off your bonnet. It is past seven!"

Phyllis obediently shouldered Mrs. Drake's cap-basket. Its contents so nearly resembled the plumes of a hearse that she felt thankful the St. Hilda's caps were not of the same model. Mrs. Drake stood before the glass waiting, and Phyllis calmly put on the creation for her.

"Is it wrong?" she asked, penitently, when she was told it was hind part before. "How very stupid of me. You see it is quite a different shape from our caps."

"I should think so, indeed!" said the matron, indignantly. "What business have chits like you with caps."

"I don't know; they're a great nuisance,"

and then the welcome sound of the gong fell upon her ears, and she knew she need devise no further expedients for delaying Mrs. Drake since there was no chance now of her interfering with the little fête between the bridal pair since Sir Royal and his wife would naturally have joined their guests.

But Phyllis looked round the drawing-room in vain. Its only tenant was the Vicar!

"Where is Nell?"

"Can't you call her by her name?" asked Mrs. Drake, spitefully; "she's worked hard enough to get it."

Answer was impossible, for the door opened to admit Sir Royal and Dr. White. The Baronet shook hands with Phyllis courteously, thanked her for her kindness to Lady Charteris, getting over that name as easily as though a week before it had not been an unhealed wound to his imagination.

Miss Ward envied his coolness, but what did it mean? Had he seen Nell? Surely yes, or he would have made some inquiry respecting her. They must have met, and, if they had, why in the name of wonders, had Sir Royal not brought his wife to dinner?

Another moment, and her curiosity was gratified.

"I am sorry my wife is unable to meet you," said the Baronet, gravely, to Mrs. Drake; "but the housekeeper tells me she is lying down with a bad headache. Doctor, will you take Miss Ward?"

For once in her life Phyllis felt angry with Nell. Why, when the meeting with her husband had been so carefully arranged, could she not at least have gone through with it? She must see the man she had married sooner or later! She couldn't go through life with perpetual excuses. It was a lack of courage Phyllis could not understand. In the same position her one desire would have been to get the meeting over.

She sat between the Vicar and her host, the doctor and Mrs. Drake being opposite. Phyllis always said the success of the repast was entirely owing to herself. She made a desperate resolve that Sir Royal should not have a gloomy memory of that first night of his home-coming, so she talked and smiled with such extreme energy that she imparted even tolerable cheerfulness to her four companions, and confirmed Mrs. Drake in her private opinion that Miss Ward was a disgrace to St. Hilda's.

"It is very good of the Sisters to spare you," said Sir Royal, presently, when conversation had turned on St. Hilda's. "Do you think if I wrote to the Superior she would lend you to us a little longer? I am sure my wife would like your companionship!"

"I should like to stay," replied Phyllis, with a radiant smile; "and I really am not much use at St. Hilda's; but I'm afraid the Sisters will want me back. You see they think I am worldly enough already, without further dissipation."

"I quite agree with them," observed Mrs. Drake, amiably; while Sir Royal, smiling, asked if a quiet visit to a dull country house could possibly be called dissipation.

"I will call on Sister Ida myself to-morrow," he said, kindly, "and ask her to let you stay with Lady Charteris until we leave Marton."

"Leave Marton!" The Vicar looked up, astonished. "My dear, Sir Royal, you can't be thinking of deserting us?"

"I fancy it would be for the best," was the thoughtful answer; "but I must consult Lady Charteris; she may like to go abroad."

"I am sure she would," volunteered Phyllis, "Nell has always dreamed of travelling."

Sir Royal looked thoughtful.

"Can you tell me—you know the suddenness of our marriage, so you will understand how little I have heard of my wife's past—can you tell me if Lady Charteris has any near relatives? I know she is an orphan, but there might be brothers and sisters!"

"No!" said Phyllis, quietly, "she has no one nearer than aunt and cousins. The eldest

cousin is her guardian; he came to see her the day after the wedding."

"No doubt he was eager to claim acquaintance with such an important person as Lady Charteris," said Mrs. Drake, maliciously, "it would have been far better taste not to be so pushing."

"I don't think Lord Delamere was at all elated at Nell's grandeur," retorted Phyllis, flinging the title like a bombshell at the disagreeable old woman. "Indeed, he said Sister Ida had taken a great deal upon herself in consenting to the union."

"Delamere?" questioned Sir Royal. "Do you mean my wife's cousin? He called on me on Thursday, and gave not a hint of it."

"He had no idea of it then," Phyllis looked demurely under her lashes. "It was only when he went to St. Hilda's he learned the truth. Of course, Sir Royal, I don't know much about such things, but he seemed to me a very respectable young man."

"Poor as a church mouse!" snapped Mrs. Drake; "the brother ran through everything." "We do not value our friends for their income, Mrs. Drake," he said simply. "I assure you Lord Delamere is a man I respect very truly. It is a great surprise to me to find myself related to him."

But the surprise did not seem a pleasant one, and the Master of Marton relapsed into silence; while poor Phyllis, in fear and dismay, had no excuse to disregard the mysterious signal Mrs. Drake conveyed to her, and had to follow the old lady to the drawing-room, where she expected to be reminded of all her sins.

"It is too bad of Nell," thought Phyllis dolefully. "She knows how the old lady hates me. Really, she might come to the rescue."

But apparently Lady Charteris meant to leave her friend to her fate, and the luckless Phyllis spent one of the most uncomfortable half-hours she ever remembered.

"I shall call at the Sisterhood to-morrow," said Mrs. Drake, "and see the Superior. I consider she has been most injudicious in sending you here. The flippancy of your conduct at dinner was abominable."

"Ought I to have cried?" asked Miss Ward meekly. "I thought it was a joyful occasion!"

"Is it the way you behave at St. Hilda's?"

"No, no!" confessed Phyllis. "There never are any gentlemen to dinner at St. Hilda's, so I don't talk to them."

"A good thing too!"

"A very good thing!" acquiesced Phyllis, sweetly; "for, from my slight acquaintance with the masculine palate, I should say, most decidedly, gentlemen would not enjoy the menu at St. Hilda's."

"Why! Do they have French cooking?"

"Oh dear, no! English, what there is of it! The fault is there is too little."

"Do you mean they eat their food raw like cannibals?"

"Oh, no! They cook a joint sometimes, but there are so many fasts and vigils, so many days when cooking is not required, that I begin to think the cook has an easy time of it."

Mrs. Drake was of the ultra-Protestant type, and had always regarded the Sisterhood with a little disfavour. She drew her chair nearer Phyllis, and waxed confidential.

"Don't you have enough to eat?"

"Plenty," averred Phyllis; "but, like the prisoners in the Bible, our food is simple—very simple. We never buy anything, we live on what we can make or produce and the alms of the faithful. People send us scraps. Once a confectioner sent us two dozen sausage rolls."

"And you ate them?"

"Unluckily," said Phyllis wickedly, "they arrived on a fast day. The Sister who keeps house mistook them for jam puffs, which, not containing meat, would have been permissible. They were accordingly served out, and, I grieve to say, no one remarked the mistake."

"Do you mean you didn't taste the difference?"



[THE LETTER—NELL'S FLIGHT DISCOVERED.]

"Oh, yes! But it was a silent day. We all bring books to dinner on silent days, and never speak."

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Drake, waxing quite confidential; "and why do they have silent days?"

"I don't know."

"And you, Miss Ward, do you agree with it all? Are you going to wear one of those hideous black veils presently?"

"I'm not good enough," said pretty Phyllis, gravely. "Sister Ida says I shall never merit such a privilege; that I am so weak and giddy, my character needs the sorrow and chastening of marriage."

"Ugh! Does she think husbands are all Bluebeards, I wonder?"

Phyllis did not reply, and the old lady, who had become much more amiable, suggested they had better ring for coffee.

"For I told the Vicar I should not stay a moment after ten. I don't approve of late hours. At the Sisterhood, I suppose, you pray all night?"

"Oh, no!" said Phyllis, promptly; "we go to bed at half past eight."

"Like a lot of little children. I suppose that's why Lady Charteris has not chosen to put in an appearance? She thought she was at St. Hilda's, and has gone to bed."

Phyllis made a desperate effort to soften Mrs. Drake's feelings towards her friend.

"Nell is not very strong, and she has been terribly upset by all this excitement."

"Didn't she want to marry him?"

"She only consented to save his life."

"And now she finds the sacrifice wasn't necessary," said the old woman, thoughtfully. "Poor child! I'll not be hard on her. I can see she's not so set up with her good fortune as I expected."

"She has done nothing but cry. Nell is very proud. She is Sir Royal's wife, and she knows he does not love her."

"She knew that before."

"I think," Phyllis spoke very slowly, "she's afraid he may think she did it for that—to be a great lady, I mean."

"Well, didn't she?"

"She did it just because she could not bear to think her voice might prove his guilt. She would have done just the same if he hadn't had a shilling."

"He has a great many shillings, and she'll find them very useful; but I daresay she does not think so now. So she's hiding away; it's just the worst thing she could do."

"So I told her."

"She's married," quotes Mrs. Drake, sagely, "and nothing in the world can alter it. Maybe it's a mistake; maybe it isn't, but she mustn't think about that now. All there's left is to make the best of it; and seeing she's got the best-looking husband in the neighbourhood, and one of the richest, I don't think she's much to complain of anyway."

Enter the gentlemen. Sir Royal gave one glance round the room.

Phyllis felt he was looking for his wife, and she asked impulsively—

"Shall I go and tell Nell coffee is ready. I am sure a cup would do her head good, and perhaps she is well enough to come down by this time."

Sir Royal smiled.

"Try to persuade her," he answered. Then in a whisper, as Phyllis passed him on her way to the door, "Indeed, Miss Ward, it would be better; she is only making things more painful by delay."

Phyllis sped away. From the tenour of the excuse the housekeeper had made to Sir Royal she did not imagine Nell had gone to bed, but expected to find her on the sofa in the pretty sitting-room, where the girls had spent most of their time.

The room was in darkness, but even then the girl would not be convinced, and lighted a candle only to find no trace of her friend.

Outside the sitting room door she met the housekeeper.

"My lady has gone to her own room, Miss Ward. She went as soon as she gave me the message."

"Is she in bed?"

"I don't know, miss. Very likely, for it is nearly ten, and she looked tired out then."

"I must see her," persisted Phyllis. "Will you go with me to her door, Mrs. Carter? There are so many steps and passages to this house I shall never know my way about it!"

They knocked twice at the door, no answer came, and a strange, dull fear took possession of Phyllis.

"Perhaps she has fainted?"

"More likely, miss, she has dropped asleep," returned Mrs. Carter. "She has had but little rest lately, and might sleep heavy."

"She was the lightest sleeper, Mrs. Carter, I don't like it; I feel scared."

"Go in and look at her then, missie; the door's not fastened."

But Phyllis clung to the old housekeeper.

"You too," she pleaded. "I can't explain it to you, Mrs. Carter; but I seem to know we shall see something terrible in there. I can't go in alone."

So the two went in together, and no terrible sight awaited them; yet Phyllis Ward's heart sank, and she understood her presentiment of evil had not been unfounded, for the little white bed was untenanted.

There was no sign of human presence in the tasteful room, but on the dressing-table lay a letter directed in a hand Phyllis knew too well to Sir Royal Charteris.

The truth came upon Phyllis like a flash of lightning.

The sweet girl friend she loved so dearly had left the house, and was now a lonely wanderer on the face of Heaven's beautiful earth.

(To be continued.)



["TELL ME TRULY," ASKED BELTRAME LEE—"DID YOU MEET HIM?"]

NOVELETTE.]

A ROMANY LASS.

:—

CHAPTER I.

It was growing dark in the woods of Ottridge; the sun had sunk long since behind the proud crowns of innumerable trees, and the stars had not yet begun to appear. There was scarcely a sound to be heard; the pigeons had ceased their cooing; the chirps of the grasshopper grew fainter, and the "brown bright nightingale" as yet was silent.

Under the shadow of the chestnuts stood a girl, waiting and watching. She made a bold dash of colour in the sombre scene, and could not fail to attract and hold the attention of any casual passer-by. Tall, with a beautifully proportioned figure, the little delicate hands, slender arched feet, and small aquiline features of the pure gipsy type, even in her strange garb she was lovely to look upon. The rich bloom of health shone through her olive skin; her large dark eyes, soft now as a gazelle's, gleamed duikily under her black brows and long lashes, and the scarlet lips, parted slightly, revealed the prettiest, whitest teeth. The short red skirt she wore was admirably calculated to display her pretty ankles and small feet, and about her head, with its masses of raven hair, she had tied a bright orange handkerchief.

"He will not come, to-night," she whispered again and again. "Ah! 'tis foolish to wait here longer;" but she sighed as she spoke, and did not evince any inclination to return to her people. "He is taking his pleasure whilst I stay here, hungering to see him. Oh! but what a fool I am! Why could I not love one of my tribe? Why can't I listen to Beltrame, who loves me?"

She looked her hands together, and stood a moment with her face upturned to the clear

evening sky. Such love, such longing in her starry eyes; such pain about the exquisite mouth, that the man who watched her involuntarily stretched out his hands to her and said softly, "Zenobia!"

She started, and the hot blood rushed tempestuously over throat and brow. "Harley!" she said, a tremour of passion in her tones, "Harley, I thought you would not come."

He had an arm about her now, and was gazing down into her eloquent eyes. "I could not come earlier; as it was, I behaved almost rudely to my host in order to get away. He was never more tedious than to-night."

"I shall be able to stay with you but a little while," the girl said, wistfully. "I shall be missed from the camp, and Beltrame will be hunting for me."

The young man winced a little at her accent, but said cheerfully, "So your cousin is still suspicious, still full of animosity towards me?"

She looked at him with a puzzled air, and answered slowly, "You mean he hates you? yes; but your long words are hard to understand."

He was a refined, intellectual young man, and though he loved her, her ignorance was always painful to him. He said, quietly, "When once I have got you all to myself I shall teach you many things. I wonder, Zenobia, if you can read."

"Ah, yes!" with a pretty air of pride in her accomplishment. "I read other things than palms: I can spell out words, if they are not too long, on scraps of paper that fall in my way. You see, it was just like this; years ago, when I was but a little maid, there was a man—a Georgio—came to our tents; he was ill, ah! so ill, and we took him in. We never turn away the sick and helpless, and our wise woman nursed him. He was a poor weak creature; he had no will; but when he grew stronger we did not send him adrift; he stayed with us, and he had

some old, old newspapers, and having nothing better to do, he taught me my letters out of them."

"And you can write?"

She flushed scarlet, and answered almost angrily, "No, how should I learn? And where would be the use? The Romany tribes have no ways like the Georgios."

When she addressed her lover it was noticeable that she hesitated in her choice of words, and seemed embarrassed. They had known each other but a few weeks, having met first on Newmarket Heath at the Two Thousand; and Harley Valence, being attracted by the gipsy girl's beauty, had laughingly allowed her to tell his fortune. Since then he had followed her from place to place, hardly thinking what the end would be to their strange friendship. But although their acquaintance dated only from April (it was now June) Zenobia had learned little tricks of speech and manner from her lover, being, like the generality of women, very imitative.

Now, with a proud gesture peculiar to her, she said, "There are many things I don't know—so many you will be ashamed of me; but then I can do much that your fine ladies daren't. I can swim, and shoot, and ride our horses barebacked, and I am so strong."

She stood straight, and tall as a young sapling beside him, her beautiful head flung back, her whole figure instinct with vigorous life.

Harley smiled, then caught her passionately to him.

"My beautiful queen!" he said, scarcely above a whisper, "do you know how dear you are to me?"

The lovely eyes met his wistfully.

"I am sure you love me—but I am afraid you will soon forget me. Beltrame says you are all faithless. Ah! look at me; I am not like the ladies you meet day by day;" she touched her dress with a disdainful gesture, glanced contemptuously at her small, but

heavy boots, then with a sigh, "Ah! if we had never met. I wish we never had, I wish we never had!" and hid her face from him.

"But why, Zenobia?" the young man questioned, blushing duskiy. "Have we not been happy?"

"Yes, but all our happiness will fly like a dream; and (she said 'an') 'tis hard to pay all my life for just a few weeks' joy. To-morrow will be our last day here; the next we march on for Ascot."

"And you will tell fortunes on the course?" Harley said, savagely; "and every fool may pay you idle compliments; may jest with you, trifle with you."

Zenobia drew herself up to her fullest height.

"The Romany lass knows how to defend herself too—(how her abuse of the aspirate vexed him). She has only one treasure, and she guards it well. All her wealth is in her virtue."

Harley sighed and moved restlessly. She was so beautiful; such a queenly creature, and with all his heart he loved her; but how could he make her his wife—this wild, untutored child of nature? How could he brave the scoffs of his friends, his proud mother's anger, her world's silent scorn?

He knew full well Mrs. Valence had determined he should marry Varena Bairholm; he himself had been well content with the arrangement until he saw Zenobia, but now he loathed the idea of a life spent with the blonde beauty. He could not cast aside this girl, who loved and trusted him; come what might he would possess her.

"Darling," he said, in a low, passionate tone, "can you bear to let me slip out of your life? Never to see me again? To know that when you say good-bye to-morrow you say good-bye for all time?"

She shivered, and grew very pale. "I must bear all this," she said, locking her hands together in a wild way. "I can't help myself."

"And when I am gone, never to return, what will you do?"

"I shall marry my cousin," recklessly. "He loves me, and my people wish it. Oh, I shall be happy at last. Oh, yes."

And suddenly she broke into wilder sobs, and clung about him with fond hands, as though she could not let him go.

His pride broke down under her grief; he forgot everything but his love.

"Sweetheart, sweetheart, hush! Do you think I will ever leave you? Do you suppose I can go back to life without you?"

"What can you mean?" she questioned, lifting her head from his breast. "Will you live our life? Will you be as one of us? No, no! You are mocking me. Make the Georgio woman your bride. The wolf does not mate with the lamb, nor the Georgio with a Romany lass!"

"Zenobia, listen! I am going to take you away; to separate you from your tribe; to show you new and wonderful things, of which you cannot even dream. Sweetheart, I am going to make you my wife!"

She listened in a dazed way, not comprehending yet all that his words implied; only deliciously happy to feel that his love for her was so great he could forget his pride for her sake. Suddenly, with an impulse peculiar to her passionate nature, she knelt down before him, clasping his hands in hers.

"Oh, how shall I thank you? How shall I serve you? What have I good enough to give you for all your love? I will be your slave, your happy slave. I will only live to please you."

He lifted her from her lowly posture. "Dear heart, when will you come to me? It must be soon." (Perhaps he feared that after all his courage might fail him)

A cloud settled upon the beautiful face.

"Oh! they will never give me to you," she said, "and I may not marry you unless the chief says yes. He is a great man; and if he says I must take Beltrame I must obey."

The idea of asking a gipsy chief's consent to his marriage was repulsive to the young man; because he loved Zenobia he was not therefore an admirer of her tribe. In fact, he had a decided aversion to the brawny rascals and withered crones of which it was chiefly composed.

"We will ask no one's consent," he said, somewhat sharply. "None but your parents could have any control over you, and as they are dead you are your own mistress. You will meet me here to-morrow evening at the same hour as to-night. You will say nothing of your plans to any creature; then I will take you to some large town. I haven't decided which, and as soon as possible we will be married."

She trusted and loved him entirely, but she hesitated a moment before giving him her promise—shrunk from the idea of leaving the old life, the old companions, who, whatever their faults, had been real and kind.

Harley Valence watched her changing face jealously.

"You love these people better than me!" he said, moodily.

"No, oh, no! But if I should not please you," she urged, humbly, "and you grew tired of me, you see, I couldn't go back to my people. It would break my heart, and they would revenge me."

"Why should you be doubtful of me?"

"I am only afraid of myself; and Harley, what will your mother say?"

"She will be angry at first, but we will find a way to appease her."

"You meant to make her pleased with me?" in a puzzled manner. "Ah, but first you must teach me to be a lady. Harley, if I come, and how can I stay away? you must promise not to take me to her so long as my ways could shame you. I know nothing—not so much as the little ones who run about your streets; and oh! Harley, you must tell her that the blood of many great men is in my veins—that I am not low born."

She spoke as a scion of some ducal family, not one of a despised and mysterious people; and he could hardly refrain from smiling.

"I promise all you ask; but, Zenobia, you can't travel with me in that dress."

"No," a look of alarm in her splendid eyes, "we should be followed; and Beltrame would kill you. Me they would carry back and cast out of my tribe, because they would think it a disgrace for a Romany lass to choose a Georgio husband."

Again he smiled, then, growing grave, said:

"I must bring you a cloak to cover this gay gown; and—have you a hat?"

She gave him a glance of exquisite surprise.

"A hat! ah, no! In rain or sun I wear such a thing as this," touching her orange head-gear.

"Then I must beg, borrow, or steal one," laughing. "What a metamorphose I shall effect. And now, sweetheart, I must keep you here no longer; it is growing dark, and your absence will be noticed. Kiss me, and say good-bye."

"For a whole long day? Ah, good-bye, good-bye," and she clung to him. "You will be kind to me. I shall not have any one but you."

A moment later he stood alone, watching the beautiful figure gliding amongst the trees. Then, when he could see her no longer, he turned and directed his steps towards his friend's house.

He was in a very strange state of mind, and far too excited to sleep. He knew he was risking a great deal by choosing to marry Zenobia Lee, but he loved her far too well to plot against her virtue or her peace.

Zenobia stole through the wood until she came to an open space where tents were pitched and camp fires burning brightly; she leaned against a tree, and looked upon the picturesque scene with melancholy eyes. To-morrow, she was leaving it all behind; to-morrow, she was to begin a new, untried life.

A few men and some older women were smoking and talking at intervals; but the girls and youths were dancing to the sound of a cracked fiddle, and their gay voices came towards Zenobia, softened by the distance, and thrilled her with indescribable pain. One woman was cooking some birds, which most certainly had never been purchased; but Zenobia would not think them less savoury because of that, her ideas concerning *meum* and *tuum* being extremely shadowy. Apart from all the rest stood a young man, slender and sinewy, lithe as an antelope, with a handsome but sullen face. This was Beltrame Lee, Zenobia's cousin, and the husband her tribe had chosen for her. He refused to join in the sports, and from time to time cast furtive glances round as though searching for the girl; and at least a brighter flame flickered in her direction revealed her to him. He hastened to her side, and muttered something in their own *patois*, to which she listened disdainfully, but made no answer.

"Where have you been?" he demanded. "To meet this lover who daren't be seen with you in the day? Who talks to you softly, and swears he loves you? Idiot! Ask him if he will marry you? Are you caught by his fine white hands; by the glister of his gold?" He paused, as if waiting for her to speak, but she maintained a rigid silence.

"Tell me truly; did you meet him?"

She nodded.

"Then it's time to make you hear sense. You've got to listen to me now; to-night I spoke to the chief, and we are to be married in a week; then let the Georgio cast his eyes upon you if he dare! Are you deaf and dumb that you treat me like a dog. My girl, I'll change all that soon, when I'm your master! Do you hear? a week from now you will be my own to do as I like with."

"Very well; it is no good to fight against the chief's orders," she answered, quietly; but there was a very dangerous gleam in her dark eyes; "and if I am to be free only seven days I must make the most of my time;" and quitting his side she ran towards the dancers, and soon was whirling round with the gayest of them. Beltrame swore a very ugly oath, and went to his tent, neither did he appear again that night.

Anyone who had studied Zenobia closely the following day would have noticed a nervousness in her manner totally new to it; a restlessness never observable before. She was particularly amiable to Beltrame, apparently forgetful of his words and manner the previous night; she gave him her brightest smiles, and kindest speeches, charming the frown from his brow, and the sullen look from his eyes.

But she was unfeignedly thankful when towards evening several of the men started from camp on a mysterious errand, the success of which would be known at supper time; and retiring to her tent she began to set her small affairs in order. Her heart was very heavy, for, rough as her people were, they had been kind to her, and she was breaking away from all old habits; she knew nothing of the life to which she was going, and if Harley failed her, she would be alone in the world. She knew, too, that according to Romany ideas she would be for ever disgraced by her marriage, and he who followed and took her life would be honoured by every member of the tribe.

She stole out at last into the gathering dusk, and went swiftly and safely by all the tents until she came to the chief's. He was standing outside; a tall, muscular figure, with a certain weird dignity about it, and he called her by her name; she obeyed the call with fast beating heart.

"Where are you going?" he asked, gruffly, and regarded her with stern eyes.

She hesitated, being all unused to lying, and he repeated his inquiry.

"I am tired of the camp," she said, slowly, all the lovely colour leaving her exquisite face. He stepped to her side, and laid his heavy

hand upon her shoulder. "Don't lie to me!" he said, fiercely; "you are going to meet the white-handed Giorgio!"

She was silent, knowing it was a grave misdemeanour to rebel against his authority, or answer insolently; and he went on impressively. "Seven days from now you will marry your cousin; it is my will, and you know what they get who go against me. What would you have? He is of your people; he is handsome; quick with the anare; ready to join in all our foraging parties; and it is not well that you, the most beautiful of our maids, should be the plaything of a stranger."

The hot colour flushed into her face, but she said quietly, "You speak without cause. I am willing to marry Beltrame if he wants me to, and—and I was going to look out for him—to tell him so."

The chief gazed into the deep, dark eyes searchingly, and seeing they did not waver, said, "If you're lying, you'll suffer for it," and he swore a terrible oath; "if not—well, go and meet him," and he pushed her away.

Glad enough to be released, she sped towards the thickest growth of trees, and presently came to the trysting spot where Harley Valence was waiting her.

"Quick, quick!" she said, breathlessly; "in a little while they'll be back, and Beltrame will guess all. They will track us down, and the dogs are keen of scent. Give me the cloak."

He folded it about her with loving care; but when he would have taken her in his arms and caressed her she set him aside with strong, impatient hands. "No, no; not yet; we are not safe. What have you there?"

"A bonnet. I stole it out of the house-keeper's room; put it on, Zenobia."

She obeyed with a disdainful *moue*, and Harley burst into a loud laugh.

"What a transformation! Oh, I wish you could see yourself; you look exquisitely funny. Draw down your veil, and let us start."

"Don't laugh so loud, you will be heard; and it ain't a good joke that's all on one side."

He was quiet in a moment, and securing one small brown hand, hurried her through the bracken and bushes, out towards the open ground.

They almost ran, fear lending speed to Zenobia's feet; and it was not long before they reached the high road. Here a dog cart waited them, and Estelbra, Harley's favourite mare, carried them on to the nearest railway station.

"Where are we going?" the girl asked when they were safely looked in a first-class carriage.

"To Southampton first; there we will be married. Oh, sweetheart, sweetheart, it is good to have won you."

The dark eyes were troubled; the sweet mouth tremulous.

"Love," she said, scarcely above a whisper, "Love, it ain't too late yet to go back. Not too late for you. Will you go?"

"Never. You are dearer than all the world to me."

Her eyes were dim with unshed tears.

"You won't change? You won't let your people make you ashamed of me, or teach you to hate me?"

"No, oh, no! You are my life—the dearest, sweetest treasure a man ever had."

He took her in his arms, and kissed the sweet mouth, the heavily fringed lids, and counted all things well lost for her dear sake. Both were silent, both harassed with many thoughts.

The girl knew that her absence from the camp had been discovered, that already the hue and cry had been raised, that men and maidens alike condemned her, alike held her worthy of death, and her heart sank at the thought that one was for ever put out of their love; that her name would be a byword amongst them.

And Harley was wondering how his mother

and Verena would receive the news of his terrible *mésalliance*. He expected nothing but fierce reproaches from the former and icy contempt from the latter; and he rather shrank from the idea of meeting his old companions.

They reached Southampton in safety, and here he secured apartments for Zenobia, and quite interested the landlady in her. He himself adjourned to the nearest hotel, and waited with what patience he could for the hour which would give him his bride.

With the landlady's assistance he purchased such articles of dress as Zenobia needed, and prevailed upon the girl to array herself in them, although she protested stoutly that they were uncomfortable, and hampered her movements.

Then, on a sunny day in June, they were married, and Harley carried his bride off to Spain, first writing a full account of all his doings to his lady mother.

There was grief and anger at Valence Rest when the news came. The mother vowed the same roof should not shelter her and her son's vagabond wife; that he had broken her heart, and disgraced her in the eyes of the whole world.

Verena Fairholm said very little, but her beautiful face was set and white, her blue eyes dark with rage at what she pleased to consider the indignity done her. And as she looked over the wide, fair acres of his estate, and saw her hope of possessing them come to naught, she said in her heart, "I will have my revenge. He has preferred a strolling gipsy to me. Let him take care!"

But Harley was sublimely unconscious of his mother's rage and Verena's hate. He had found a secluded house at a little distance from Madrid, and was deeply engaged in educating his wife.

Her naive and intelligent questions amused and gratified him; and it was pleasant indeed to form her tastes, to mould her ideas; and, above all, he loved her, and his love grew with every fresh day, until she was indeed the breath of his life.

CHAPTER II.

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety."

Two years had passed since Harley Valence made his quixotic match, and now all the county was on the *qui vive*, because he was returning to his home, bringing his bride with him. Those two years had been very happy ones to him; in nothing had Zenobia disappointed him. Her beauty was more matured, more refined; she moved and spoke as a lady. It seemed she had forgotten the old life, the old habits; that she had indeed been born in the sphere to which he had raised her.

It was a lovely July evening, and Mrs. Valence sat at a window, looking out upon the high road. There was a frown upon the lady's brow, and a cruel light in her cold gray eyes, which Verena marked with secret delight.

"They will be here soon," she said, "and we shall be expected to do honour to this fortunate vagrant. I wonder how she will meet us!"

Mrs. Valence moved impatiently, and her eyes flashed angrily.

"Do you imagine, Verena, that I will yield my place in the house to her? That I will daily endure her society, submit to her will?"

"If you don't," with a light laugh, "you will have to be content with the Dower House. It is horribly poky, and you would be suffocated. Take my advice, Mrs. Valence, and make the best of a bad bargain, as I intend to do."

The elder woman looked at her surprisedly.

"Have you grown suddenly meek, Verena?" she asked, scornfully. "Does not this woman stand in the place you coveted; has she not won the man you loved?"

"Who said I loved your son? It is false;

but I did covet a share in his goods, a position in the county, and wanted to reign here as mistress. Well, I failed to please him. Why should I waste my life in regret? I am only twenty, beautiful, and well born; shall I despair of winning an eligible *parti*? Pooh!" laughing again. "Have I not more lovers than any other girl of your acquaintance?"

Mrs. Valence looked at her perplexedly.

"You are an enigma to me, Verena; and can you honestly say you bear Mrs. Harley Valence no malice?"

"She is too low either for my scorn or my hate," retorted the girl, and moved her position that she might the better see her own exquisite reflection.

She was as tall as Zenobia, and more fully developed, with a complexion of dazzling fairness; blue eyes, and masses of deep gold hair, drawn in heavy coils about the crown of her head.

And to-night she had chosen a dress admirably calculated to enhance her charms. A composition of white silk and frosted tulle, and about her throat she wore a string of turquoises.

"We shall form a delightful contrast," she said, mockingly, "this black-browed beauty and myself; and I am wondering in what guise she will appear at table. A tartan plaid and a wisp of orange silk about her throat would be effective."

Mrs. Valence frowned; her ward's levity displeased her.

"I shall not go down to meet her. Harley must bring her to me," she said, with the air of a queen. Then started as the carriage came in view round the bend of the road.

Verena rose.

"I shall go down to meet her. I am positively devoured with anxiety concerning my fortunate rival!"

In a little while the carriage bowed up the drive, and Verena went slowly downstairs to meet the young husband and wife.

She was considerably surprised when her eyes fell upon Zenobia. She had expected to confront a bold, handsome, but none the less coarse-looking woman; and her dormant hate stirred to active life when she saw that her beauty was as nothing when compared with the radiant loveliness of the interloper.

Eyes dark as night, brilliant as stars; a face whose perfection was the realisation of a poet's dream; a queenly, noble figure, with a lithe grace it would be impossible to imitate.

She was wearing a dark-green costume, relieved by dashes of oranges; and Verena felt that she would have a hard fight for supremacy.

"Verena, this is kind," said Harley, leading Zenobia forward. "I am glad to make you known to my wife."

The blonde beauty hated him for his evident love for and pride in Zenobia, but she had been trained to mask her feelings; so she went forward with a little smile, and with outstretched welcoming hand. "I ought to be jealous of you, you are so beautiful; as it is, I can only admire you and hope we may be friends," she leaned forward as she spoke and kissed the scarlet mouth.

Ah! Zenobia was no match for this fair-faced woman; she could not meet cunning with cunning, or profess friendship with her lips, whilst hate was in her heart. Her beautiful eyes grew very tender as they rested on Verena.

"You have small need for jealousy," she said, warmly; "has no one told you how exquisite you are?"

Verena laughed lightly.

"I believe Harley did once or twice, she answered lightly. "Now, let us go up to Mrs. Valence; she is anxious to see you. She has been imagining all sorts of horrid things about you, and will be heartily glad to know her anxiety was needless."

Every word she uttered was sped with a wish to sting; but who could believe this when she smiled so sweetly and spoke in such gentle, welcoming tones?

"I hope you won't object to my residence here," she said, leading the way. "I have lived at Valence Rest from childhood, and hope I shall never leave it until I go to a home of my own. Do you think you can endure me, Mrs. Valence? And will you promise not to be jealous of my friendship with Harley," archly, "even though we once played at sweethearts?"

The beautiful serene face of her rival did not change, her voice was sweet, and even as she said, "Harley chose me from all other women; I should be mad to doubt him."

As Verena turned swiftly and opened the drawing-room door her face was not good to see.

"Mrs. Valence, the wanderers have returned," she announced, gaily, "and already Mrs. Harley and I are sworn friends."

The elder woman rose, and first touching her son's head with cold chill fingers, turned to Zenobia. "You will like to change your dress," she said, "and dinner will be served in half an hour;" then she sank back in her chair, apparently forgetful of the girl's presence. The dusky colour flooded Zenobia's face, and her eyes flashed fire, but she controlled herself admirably, and said, "I shall be glad if you will show me the way to my apartments, Miss Fairholm!"

Verena had not quite bargained for this, but she rose with alacrity.

"I shall be pleased to acquaint you with all the nooks and crannies of the place, unless Harley forestalls me. Come," and she led the way, leaving mother and son together.

The young man advanced, looking very wrathful. "Mother, it is well we should understand each other at the outset. This is my home, and my wife is its honoured mistress; if you are willing to treat her with the deference and courtesy she deserves, well and good; if not, you must remove to the Dower House."

Mrs. Valence covered her face with her hands and sobbed out a lament upon the ingratitude of children. The shame her son had brought upon their ancient and honoured name; the readiness with which he cast her aside for a gipsy adventuress.

Harley stopped her with an impatient gesture, and a word more forcible than polite.

"Listen to me, mother. There is no need for recrimination; you are very dear to me, but my wife is dearer, and any insult offered her will anger me more than the vilest calumny urged against myself. You know the conditions upon which you can alone remain at Valence Rest; it would be well to observe them."

"If you send me away all the county will cry shame upon you; and do you suppose that you will be received by any one family? No, your *méalliance* has put you altogether outside the pale."

"We shall see," sternly; "my wife is as virtuous as she is beautiful; and in our own set the two things do not always go hand in hand; she is educated and refined; she can hold her own, and will do so. It would be as well, mother, to remember she is a resolute woman."

"Have you already sunk to the level of a hen-pecked husband?" she sneered.

He laughed heartily.

"Wait and see! And now, if you will excuse me, I will run off to dress," and without another word, he left her.

In the days immediately following Mrs. Valence discovered she had no mean antagonist to compete with, and as she had a holy horror of residing at the Dower House she was compelled to treat Zenobia with some degree of courtesy. The young wife took the management of the household in her own hands, and governed wisely and well; she was generous and just, and soon became popular with the servants.

One day Verena said with her sweetest smile, "I wonder how it is, you, who spent eighteen years amongst the gipsies, should so

easily acquire the manner and accomplishments of a lady?"

Zenobia smiled. "My instructor was the man I loved, and it was easy to learn all things for his sake!"

"And don't you ever wish to see your people again? Have you quite forgotten them?"

"No, no; how could one forget? I love them still. Sometimes I long to meet them once again; they were good to me, and the same blood flows in our veins."

"But it would never do for the Mistress of Valence Rest to associate with vagrants," insolently; but Zenobia seemed lost in thought, and for awhile did not reply. At last she said, "When I left my tribe I left it for ever. I gave my life into my husband's hands to do with it as he would."

Verena laughed harshly. "What a model wife! You will be a shining light in this depraved nineteenth century; and one hardly expects such moral precepts from a girl of your race."

For once the young wife suffered her resentment to appear.

"Pardon," she said, with some scorn; "my birth is superior to your own; the blood of kings is in my veins."

"This is absurd. My dear Zenobia, you would find it quite impossible to prove your statement. Gipsies are nothing more than wandering vagrants, poachers, cozeners, fortune-tellers. But you are perfection."

"If we are all you say (and I deny it), who made us so? Have we not been persecuted for endless ages, driven from country to country. Have we not patiently and silently borne indignities, scoffs, and scourges?"

"You are excited," laughed the other, "and most beautiful in your excitement," and there the conversation ended.

The next day Zenobia gave her first dinner party, and Verena watched anxiously for some defect in the arrangements, but found none. She amiably desired that at the last moment the guests would fail to appear, and was savagely disappointed when carriage after carriage rolled up to the door.

Where she had been wont to receive adulation she was now a mere nonentity, and her rage increased with every passing moment. The young hostess was superb, in a dress of crimson silk and lace, and about her throat she wore a necklace of rubies—Harley's latest extravagance. But she had utterly refused to adopt the so-called *full* dress of an English lady. Her gown was cut square at the throat and filled in with lace, and when Verena laughed at her for her primitive notions she retorted,—

"I heard some ladies in the town commenting on the dresses of ballet girls; to my mind they were infinitely more modest than the ordinary woman's evening dress."

"Ah! you have a *penchant* for spangles naturally."

"These girls wore no spangles, but tight-fitting garments, calculated to display any beauty of symmetry, and yet not verging on the immodest."

She moved away with a little impatient gesture, and devoted herself to her guests. All through the long evening she played her part perfectly, and even those who professed not to admire her were compelled to acknowledge Harley's wife was perfect in ways and speech.

She sang to them in a wild sweet voice, accompanying herself on the harp—songs she had learned in Spain, songs she remembered from childhood.

Then Verena took her seat at the piano, and after some brilliant execution favoured the company with songs chiefly relating to gipsy peccadilloes; the cunning and ingratitude of gipsy women.

There were very few who did not condemn her line of conduct; who did not glance anxiously at Zenobia, whose face had flushed duskiy. But when Verena moved from her

seat she merely said, with a faint cold smile,—

"You have hardly done justice to the women of my race," and from that hour a doubt of Verena's truth stirred in her heart.

She quickly became popular in the county, and that without much effort on her part. Her parties were successes, her toilets perfection, and day by day Harley's love for her increased. He took her to town, where, if she had chosen, she might have posed as professional beauty. He was delighted with the homage paid her, the encomiums lavished upon her style, her loveliness, and as his mother said, sneeringly, "Was more infatuated with her than ever."

So two years passed by. Verena had attained her majority, but though not unsought was still unwed, and resided at Valence Rest. She was waiting for the revenge which she had sworn to have, and it seemed further off than ever.

To add to her mortification, a son had been born to Harley—a beautiful child, so like the mother that Harley was inordinately proud of it, and Verena thought if she could but strike him through his child she should revenge herself on Zenobia too.

She waited and watched, professing great love for the little one, great affection for the mother, and confessing nothing to her late guardian.

"Whilst I hold my own counsel I am safe; and my day will come!"

CHAPTER III.

"WEAVING HER WEB."

"ZENOBIA, there are gipsies in the moat, and I was wondering if any of them are old friends or acquaintances of yours."

Zenobia sat, her child on her knee, the very picture of a happy wife and mother. She looked up now with a flush on her face, for there was a covert sneer in Verena's tone.

"How long have they camped there? I thought Harley objected to their occupying the wood; he says the fires spoil the grass and trees."

"Of course they do; but since his marriage he has a predilection for the nomad race. I wonder what dark arts you used to enslave him?"

"I practised no magic," tossing the child up in the air. "I fancy for once the poet's idea of love at first sight was realized. Once again, baby—higher still."

"I wish you would talk quietly; I've a fit of the blues this morning, and I want you to coax them away. Pray put the child down; he will do well enough by himself."

Zenobia sat down, still clasping the little one close.

"Have you seen these people, Verena, and what size is their encampment?"

"I haven't been near the place for a week. I am rather nervous with regard to such people; the men are mostly footpads, and do not hesitate to attack defenceless women who are likely to prove good spoil."

The other flushed hotly.

"You are mistaken, Verena; there are bad people in every tribe and nation. The Georgios (unconsciously slipping back into the old way of speech) are not infallible. They, too, drink, and lie, and steal."

"You are positively angry," with a light laugh; "and why should you be? Have you not separated yourself from your clan? Are you not one of us?"

Zenobia looked troubled.

"One never forgets," she said, simply; "and if they were angry with me where was the wonder?"

"You mean you disappointed them, that you were to have married your handsome cousin? What was his name? And why did you not call Percy after him, in memory of old days?"

"Because I hope my boy will be a better and nobler man than Beltrame!"

"What a romantic name! And I like a man with a spice of mischief in him; I wonder will you ever see him again, and under what circumstances!" She rose as she spoke. "Will you go out this morning; or shall you stay at home until Harley returns? Why, if he were to absent himself for six months you would become quite a recluse. It is such a bright fine morn, and we shall not have many more like it! This is the twenty-seventh, and what a glorious September it has been!"

"Yes, the leaves have scarcely changed yet, and few if any have fallen!"

Miss Fairholm leaned a moment over the young heir, playfully pinching his cheek.

"Good-bye, you most enviable of mortals, good-bye, Zenobia! I must be content with a solitary stroll!"

A little later she left the house, and making a considerable detour, found her way at last into the wood. Soon the sound of many voices assured her she was near the encampment, and stooping behind some bushes she watched the moving figures curiously. Could it be these were Zenobia's people, and that at length her triumph was near? She had heard tales of deadly revenge perpetrated by them upon offending members of their race, and she thought if she could meet Beltrame Lee the game would be in her own hands; she would not hesitate to give her rival into his power.

Perhaps her light garments attracted attention; however that might be, a pair of keen eyes had taken note of the kneeling figure, and a stealthy form was gradually drawing nearer. She started with a little cry when a small slender but strong hand grasped her shoulder, and springing to her feet, said angrily, "How dare you touch me? Take your hand from me!" for whatever she had said to the contrary to Zenobia, she was no coward. Her blue eyes flashed, and her beautiful face was flushed with scornful pride, and yet she could not repress a little thrill of admiration, as she looked on the handsome, dusky, young man beside her.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, roughly. "Why are you spying upon us?"

"I was not spying upon you," haughtily; "and only your guilty conscience could make you imagine such a thing! I was only curious to see your camp."

"And now you've seen it you'd better go. We don't like sneaks."

"You had far better remain civil; because I have power to make you leave this part of the country at once."

He regarded her sneeringly.

"You've got to prove that, ain't a boast!"

"I can easily. I live at the house yonder, and its master, the owner of this land, is my greatest friend; any rudeness to me would be hardly punished."

"You're ready with your threats, and that ain't wise; I could rob you of these pretty toys if I chose. I could press all the breath out of your body and none know it! My people would help me and make your buryin' short!"

She never wavered, never trembled, and the gipsy could scarcely fail to admire her courage.

"You are talking stupidly, and you know it," she said, coldly. "You dare not harm me. Let me pass!"

"Not till you tell me what brought you here," he said, sullenly; but he relaxed his hold on her, and withdrew a pace from her. She shook herself as though to cast away the contamination of his touch, then answered slowly,

"I came to have my fortune told, but did not wish to be seen by all those low brutes," by a gesture indicating the men lounging about the fire.

The gipsy's dark face grew darker; but he said only,

"I will fetch a wise woman, and don't you try runnin' away from me. It won't do. I

can see your light dress amongst the bushes, and should soon catch you up!"

"I shall not run away," contemptuously; "but it would be as well to warn my friend that he preserves are in danger!"

"Who is your friend?" staggered by her coolness and her taunt.

"Harley Valence," looking full into his eyes. "He is a gentleman, but he married a woman of your race!"

The rich flush of health faded from his cheek, and all unconsciously he grasped her hand.

"Tell me her name. You shall not go until you do!"

"She was called Zenobia Lee!" still regarding him intently.

He flung up his hands with a gesture of wild triumph.

"Found! found!" he cried, with fierce exaltation, and then he muttered something she did not understand.

Still she stood watching him with pitiless blue eyes, and saw that he trembled from head to foot.

"Who are you?" she questioned, "and what do you know of Mrs. Valence?"

He regarded her cunningly.

"Why do you want to know? That you may warn her? That you may say danger threatens her? Ah! but you must tell her, too, that having once found her I will never let her go again."

"You are Beltrame Lee, and you have nothing now to fear from me. I am not her friend, rather her enemy, for she robbed me of all I strove for! She stands in my place, queens it where I should reign. You want revenge, so do I; but it must be revenge that touches her alone."

His dusky eyes gleamed with an ugly light. "What would you do to get your heart's desire?" he asked aggressively.

"Anything; her husband should be mine! Her name, her wealth, her position, are all stolen from me. We have one wish in common, you and I; let us join hands, and see if two heads are not better than one!"

"You are a brave woman, and you are cruel; if you hate her you won't go against me. You lost your husband; I lost my wife! Well, then, let us live for revenge!"

"With all my heart!"

Come with me. I know a little hollow where we may be alone; and speak low, our people have sharp ears."

"And sharp eyes," laughing lightly. "Lead the way, Monsieur Beltrame."

When they reached the spot of which he had spoken he turned sharply, and confronted her.

"What will you do? What will you dare?"

"Anything that you will venture, so long as it doesn't entail discovery."

"Speak plain, and don't use long words. Will you let me do as I like with him?"

"No, I won't!" boldly. "He and his property are to remain untouched; but, if you would wound her most, take her child from her."

"We don't want more young 'uns in camp than we've got. I'll leave the little 'un to him, jist to comfort him when his wife's gone. She walks in silks and fine jewels now; but she'll come back to her own ways soon, whether she wants or not. She'll have to give him up, and stand afore all of us to be judged, and there ain't one as will forgive her what she's done. Oh, my dainty leddy, don't be afraid but what we'll hold our own. And when she's clean gone, what'll you do?"

"Marry him," boldly. "But you must convince him she is dead; or, if not dead, dishonoured—he must think her false. I will teach him that lesson, and you must help me."

"And what'll be my wage?" he asked, with an access of covetousness.

"You shall be handsomely paid—but your reward must be in accordance with your work. I must leave you now, or my absence will be discovered and made much of. To-morrow I

will be here again at the same time. And cannot you feign a friendship for Zenobia? cannot you entice her here?"

"You must give me time to think. My brain ain't so swift and clear as yours. And if you could make me a little present to-day, leddy, I would be obliged."

She emptied the contents of her purse into his ready palm.

"You ain't told me your name yet, leddy. Oh, don't fear as I shall tell it again."

"Verena Fairholm," she answered, and stole through dim alleys of trees to Valence Rest.

There was a deep, glad triumph in her heart as she thought that the hour of victory was near, that Zenobia should be dethroned, and she, herself, should queen it in the old home of the Valences.

All that day she was so bright, so eager to please, that Zenobia regarded her with wonder, and Mrs. Valence with suspicion. As she passed that lady's room on her way downstairs she called to her,—

"Verena, come here."

She obeyed, with a smile on her mouth, a strange look in her blue eyes.

Mrs. Valence laid her white hands upon her shoulders.

"What has made you so jubilant? What mischief are you hatching?"

Verena threw back her golden head with a gesture of amusement.

"How shrewd you are! Ah, well, dear friend, if you are curious it is my pleasure to humour you. There are gipsies in the wood; and now you may look out for domestic squalls."

"What do you mean? Do you suppose Zenobia would go back to her own people, or risk Harley's displeasure for them? She isn't such a fool."

Verena laughed contemptuously.

"I find I wasted a compliment upon you when I called you shrewd. See; you and I have not forgiven her intrusion in the family. We will watch for her downfall!"

The elder woman flushed hotly.

"I will do nothing dishonourable; and if I supposed you were bent upon tempting her to disgrace our name I would go at once to Harley and tell him all the truth. For my son's sake, for the sake of her little child, I will not have her dishonoured!"

Again Verena laughed, although there was a dim wonder in her eyes at what she thought stupidity on Mrs. Valence's part.

"I shall do nothing," she said. "I shall only watch her; and I am convinced she will follow the bent of her own will. And, now, if you have quite finished with me, I will go down. There are several eligible *partis* present to night; who knows but I may succeed in capturing the best of them all?"

That evening, when chance placed her beside Zenobia, she whispered,—

"I had a most romantic adventure this morning, dear. I met a handsome, gipsy youth, who volunteered to tell me my fortune. In return, I asked him his name, and was fairly confused when he said Beltrame Lee."

The rich bloom died out of Zenobia's face.

"He here!" she said, in a sharp tone. "His coming means mischief!"

"No, indeed. In my confusion I said, 'Why, you are Zenobia's cousin,' and, of course, after that he wanted to know all about you, and expressed himself delighted to hear of your prosperity. But if you wish to see him, I would advise you not to venture too near the encampment—he tells me the tribe is at enmity with you."

"As he is too in his heart. Do I not know him? His implacable hate, his persistent will. He means no good to me or mine."

She was ill at ease all through the evening, and Harley watched her with anxious eyes. Verena was not slow to notice this, and when he walked out upon the balcony she followed him there.

"How worried you look, Harley! What has happened, or about to happen?"

"Nothing of any importance; at least, to my knowledge. Why do you ask?"

"I thought you were vexed because those gipsies have located themselves on your land. Do you suppose they will try to claim privileges because of their kinship to Zenobia?"

"What are you talking about? I did not know anything of this matter. And you don't suppose all gipsies are related each to the other."

"But if this tribe should be the very one from which you chose your wife, would you allow any interview between her and them?"

"Most certainly not! Mrs. Valence does not consort with tramps and blackguards. Does she know they have settled here?"

"Yes; I told her. I saw some of them this morning; and one was a handsome young fellow, whom his companions called Beltrame. Not an uncommon name, I believe, among gipsies."

(To be concluded in our next.)

THE GOLDEN HOPE.

—O—

CHAPTER XXXIV.—(continued.)

All now became bustle and confusion. The carriages came up in front of the portico, and the bridegroom and his friends took their seats, and were driven towards the parish church, a mile distant. They had scarcely disappeared when the bride came floating down the stairs, radiant in white satin, Brussels veil and orange blossoms.

She looked as sweet, fair, and childlike as on the evening of her arrival, and came up to Lady Redwoode with a pretty pleading look that would have touched her ladyship's heart a week earlier. But now she met that gaze coldly. She knew that it was not an innocent, childlike soul that looked at her through those soft blue eyes. She began to suspect Cecile's true character, and though she did not turn away from her caresses, she submitted to them so passively, and returned them so quietly, that the maiden was at no loss to interpret her feelings.

Lady Redwoode and the bride went out to their carriage, entered, and were also driven to the parish church, a pretty rustic edifice, covered with ivy, situated in the centre of a small hamlet.

The clergyman was in waiting. The little church was filled with eager spectators, the friends and neighbours of Lady Redwoode. The people of the hamlet thronged near the door, and the Redwoode servants and tenants found room in nooks and corners. Mr. Forsythe and his friends were waiting impatiently, and the former looked anything but delighted when his bride made her appearance. The marriage had become intolerable to him, the more so because it was now inevitable.

The bridal party walked up the dim old aisle, between the lines of eager, admiring faces. With a thrill of exultation Cecile felt their admiring glances, threw her vain little head back, blushed and smiled as if she were the queen of a ball, instead of the chief actress in a scene of high and solemn import.

Something of the actress feeling clung to her throughout the ceremony. She made her responses in a subdued tone, knelt with the coquettish grace, strangely out of place there, and paid no heed to the solemn questions, the grave injunctions, and the final lingering benediction of the good clergyman.

The time seemed short to her, but interminable to her bridegroom. He listened with pale, set lips, answered in a choked voice, and could have shrieked in anger and grief when the last words were spoken, and he was bound in indissoluble ties to the pretty creature at his side.

Married to Cecile when he loved Hellice! Bound to Cecile when fortune had turned

against her, and she was likely to prove a burden and an encumbrance to him!

How he loathed her at that moment! How he hated himself! How fervently he wished that Hellice might never be found—that she might never come back with her bewitching face, to torture his heart with an unavailing love, and to wrest from him his prosperity!

With a pale, stern face he conducted his bride down the aisle to the little vestry at one side of the porch, where they were to sign their marriage certificate, and where their friends were coming to congratulate him upon his good fortune, and to wish happiness to his fair young bride.

Cecile leaned with an air of confidence on his arm, her blue eyes drooping with pretended shyness under their golden lashes, her brow flashing under her pretty hair, and her garments trailing gracefully over the carpeted floor. To most of the spectators she looked like a spotless angel, and Mr. Forsythe was envied his prize by more than one noble, manly young heart there.

The bridegroom looked straight before him, seeing everybody, and marking the envy and admiration of all with inward contempt. He saw Sir Richard Haughton among the spectators, and the Baronet exhibited a pale, stern, haggard face and compressed lips—a face all bitterness, suppressed grief, and terrible anxiety—a face that with its unfaltering faith and love in his betrothed would have brought Hellice to his arms, could she only have seen it.

Mr. Forsythe saw, too, another face which was directed towards Sir Richard Haughton, a face that he had seen years before and worshipped for a brief while—the face of Margaret Sorel. Mr. Forsythe had seen her on the stage, had flung her bouquets, had visited her in the green-room, and had entertained a brief passion for her, but it had soon died a natural death. He remembered her perfectly as he looked at her dark face, with its hard lines, and its frame of brown-black hair, and remembered, too, the story of her subsequent marriage and divorce. She was watching Sir Richard with a jealous, yearning gaze, jealous because she knew his stern sadness was for her younger, purer, fairer rival.

It was a brief vision that Mr. Forsythe had of her, but she chanced to turn her gaze, their eyes met, and were expressive of recognition. The next moment Mr. Forsythe had passed on with his bride, there was a stir among the audience, and the actress drew her thick veil over her face to conceal her features from her divorced husband.

The ordeal was tedious, but it was at last over. The stereotyped congratulations were ended, friendly wishes uttered, and the bride and bridegroom rode back to Redwoode in the carriage with the baroness. The wedding breakfast awaited them, and proved to be a marvel of good taste, reflecting unbounded credit upon the stout French cook and his assistants. But a small party sat down to it. Sir Richard Haughton had gone away again on his search for his betrothed; his uncle was lingering in the vicinity of Holly Bank; and no neighbours had been invited. It was not a pleasant and lively entertainment. Nearly every heart had its weight of care, nearly every brow was shaded more or less with gloom. It was concluded at length, however, and the family returned to the drawing-room, soon after dispersing to their rooms.

Mr. Forsythe took Mr. Anchester apart, and urged his immediate departure from Redwoode, stating that he had changed his mind, and purposed going somewhere on a bridal tour. He remarked that Lady Redwoode would accompany her daughter, and suggested that the East Indian adventurer should visit his friends during their absence.

"Very well," declared Mr. Anchester, with a smile that made him strangely uneasy, "I'll be off at once. Expect me back in a month. Mr. Forsythe!"

To Mr. Forsythe's great delight, Mr. An-

chester went up to his room, and soon returned, his attire changed, and a carpet-bag in his hand, ready for departure. He could scarcely express his jubilation at this prompt acquiescence in his wishes; but his heart would have sunk again had he known that Mr. Anchester was about to go to Hellice, and devote himself to the task of winning her consent to become his wife. He summoned a carriage, bade the adventurer farewell, and watched his departure with increasing delight. He even rubbed his hands as the carriage rolled out of the lodge gates, and muttered:

"The first and most imminent danger has been met and conquered! Lady Redwoode will summon Mr. Anchester to a conference in vain. I did not like the look of his eyes. He would betray me if he had the chance. He is well got rid of. Before he returns my position must be assured. Lady Redwoode must have taken a decisive step to my advantage. But how to make her do so? I must make Cecile my confidante. We are in the same boat now, and must sink or swim together. I will seek her in her chamber."

Obedying the impulse, he hastened towards his bride's apartments.

Cecile had gone to her boudoir, and had found her ayah awaiting her, in a state of the most joyful excitement. The berry-brown face of the Hindoo was all aglow, her eyes glittered like pieces of polished steel, and her mouth was wreathed with pleasant smiles.

"Safe now, my sweet!" she cried significantly and gleefully. "Never sun shone on fairer bride. My golden lily! How people looked, stared and envied! Did you see me in the church?"

"No, Renee," replied the bride, tripping up to a long panelled mirror, and surveying her reflection in it with great complacency. "You must think I had nothing to do but look around me. It was very pleasant to have so many assembled to look at me, for of course people never look at a bridegroom. Gentlemen are always stupid-looking creatures in their bridal garments. I must say I did myself credit, and Andrew really conducted himself very well—for a man!"

She flung out the folds of her splendid veil with one hand, and sighed regretfully that the pageant was over and her bridal attire no longer suitable.

"Has mamma been in here?" she asked. "I stopped a moment in the conservatory while she came up stairs alone."

Renee answered the question in the negative, adding:

"Lady Redwoode went to her own room, missy. I met her maid in the hall just before you came up, and she said she had orders to invite Mr. Anchester to my lady's boudoir in an hour. Lady Redwoode will rest in the meantime."

"Mamma desires a private conference with Mr. Anchester! How very singular!" exclaimed Cecile, uneasily, and with sudden pallor. "What can it mean?"

"I don't know, my pet. She suspects something, I am sure. She has questioned me sharply lately, and has bribed me to tell her the whole truth, but it's little satisfaction she got out of Renee," and the Hindoo smiled, showing her white teeth. "Renee will always be faithful to her darling!"

"But Mr. Anchester!" cried the bride, in increasing agitation. "I distrust him! He will do anything for money, and oh, Renee, he knows our secret! He listened when papa was dying! What shall I do?"

Her face was as white as her bridal robe, as she looked at the ayah in utter dismay. The woman turned pale also, and stared incredulously at her young mistress.

"At any rate," she said, in a startled whisper, "you are safe! you have strengthened your position by marrying Mr. Forsythe!"

"Perhaps I have, and perhaps I haven't," interrupted Cecile, sharply. "I must see Mr. Anchester. Yet mamma can outbribe

me. Oh, was any one ever as miserable on her wedding-day?"

She commenced to walk to and fro, her face looking suddenly pinched and haggard under its crimped hair and orange blossoms, in strange mockery with her bridal attire. She wrung her pretty jewelled hands until her gloves fell from them torn and soiled, and she hurried backwards and forwards with an impetuosity that made her resemble her wronged cousin.

In the midst of her despair, there was a knock at the door, and Renee opened it, admitting the bridegroom.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Now I will unclasp a secret lock,
And to your quick-conceiving discontents
I'll read you matter deep and dangerous;
As full of peril and advent'rous spirit,
As to o'erwalk a current, roaring loud,
On the unsteadfast footing of a spear;

—SHAKESPEARE: *Henry IV.*

THERE was a strange and sinister look on the visage of Andrew Forsythe, as he entered the chamber of his young bride; an evil and significant meaning in his bearing; and a scheming expression in his eyes that showed plainly that all the wickedness in his nature was active and self-assertive at that moment. Cecile raised her gaze to his countenance with a fleeting blush on her cheeks, but her face grew strangely white and her manner agitated, as she instinctively comprehended that a crisis in her destiny was at hand, and that her bridegroom had sought her, not to whisper sweet nothings in her ear, but to consult with her upon the best means by which to avert a threatening and deadly peril.

She sat down, with a sudden feeling of faintness. Mr. Forsythe approached her with long and rapid strides, and seated himself in an arm-chair close beside her.

"Dismiss your woman, Cecile," he said, abruptly. "I wish to talk with you."

Cecile turned to her ayah with a gesture of dismissal, but the Hindoo hesitated to obey it. She comprehended from Mr. Forsythe's manner that he was greatly disturbed in mind and soul, and she desired to be admitted into his counsels. She bent forward, with a pleading expression on her berry-brown face; but, before she could say a word, Cecile repeated her gesture impatiently and imperiously that nothing remained but simple obedience. Tossing her head angrily, therefore, until her long earrings tinkled like bells, she went into the adjoining chamber, and closed the door loudly behind her.

"Well, what is it?" cried Cecile, anxiously, when she found herself alone with her husband. "What has happened?"

Mr. Forsythe seemed in no hurry to reply. He permitted his gaze to wander over the luxurious adornings of the boudoir, but evidently as one who looks and sees not, and then called it by a visible effort to the white-robed, white-veiled figure, close beside him.

"Why don't you answer?" demanded Cecile, with increasing impatience. "Is Mr. Anchester a traitor to us? Is he in mamma's room at this moment?"

"You have guessed, then, the danger that threatens us?" said Mr. Forsythe. "Mr. Anchester is not with Lady Redwoode, but her ladyship suspects that he knew you in India, and that he has some hold upon you. She even imagines that he may have become possessed of the secret of your parentage. She told me this morning that she should question him, bribe him—"

"Oh, what shall we do?" interrupted Cecile, in sharp tones of despair. "Mr. Anchester would sell his soul for money. His old love for me has turned into hatred, and he would give much to revenge himself upon me!"

"I knew all this, Cecile, and I have met

the peril by sending Mr. Anchester away. I pretended that you and I were going off somewhere on a bridal tour. He is gone already, and will not return in less than a month!"

Cecile clasped her hands in an ecstasy of joy, and a look of intense relief passed over her features.

"A month's respite!" she ejaculated. "What can we not do in a month?"

"You see, then, that we must do something? Our position is perfectly insecure, Cecile. Our prosperity depends entirely upon a man who once loved you, but who now hates you with a bitter revengefulness. He would like to humble us, to cast us forth upon the world penniless and helpless, and I know that he has made within his own soul a vow to accomplish our humiliation and degradation!"

Cecile uttered a cry of terror and alarm, and wrung her hands helplessly.

"We must outwit him," said Mr. Forsythe, quickly and determinedly. "We must work together and at once. You proved yourself clever enough in that poisoning affair, and you must assist me by even subtler schemes now. You do not half comprehend our peril, Cecile. When Mr. Anchester went away he flung back to me a look of cunning and triumph, that enlightened me considerably as to his plans. He is no blunderer, but an enemy as clever as ourselves, and we can only outwit him by acting unitedly and promptly."

"What do you suppose his plans are?" asked Cecile. "He does not know that Lady Redwoode suspects him, or wishes to bribe him!"

"Can you not see his plans? He left Redwoode on the morning of the day that Hellice disappeared from Holly Bank. I was struck by the coincidence, made some inquiries, and discovered that he went to North Eldon!"

"Well?" said Cecile, in a hollow whisper, and with staring eyes.

"Do you not yet comprehend? He went to Holly Bank, saw Hellice, and ingratiated himself into her confidence on the strength of their acquaintance in India. He learned from her of the accusations against her, and offered her his friendship and consolation. Hellice has an ardent, tropical nature, and very probably she turned to him as to a brother. His next step was to offer her a home, and she of course accepted the offer. He was gone from Redwoode three or four days, and during that time he found Hellice a safe and secure refuge. I noticed that he had a strangely self-satisfied expression whenever the girl's disappearance was mentioned. He went away very willingly this morning. He did not go to Lord Anchester's, for he had worn out his welcome there. He did not go to visit a friend, for he has no friends in England. He went to Hellice!"

"And he will bring her back to Redwoode?" cried Cecile.

"Yes, as his wife!"

The astute reasoner spoke these words as if he had been firing a bombshell, and Cecile listened to them, as she would have listened to the unexpected bursting of a bomb—pallid, stunned, and terribly frightened.

"When Mr. Anchester brings Hellice here as his bride," said Mr. Forsythe, "your star and mine must set for ever. She will tell the truth about the poisoning affair, and we shall be dismissed from Redwoode!"

"But Hellice won't marry Mr. Anchester," said Cecile, with a desperate clinging to the last straw of hope. "She loves Sir Richard Haughton—"

Mr. Forsythe smiled sardonically.

"Women don't always marry whom they love!" he said. "Mr. Anchester finds Hellice alone, friendless, unprotected. He plays the friend and lover. He tells falsehoods about Sir Richard Haughton, of course. He promises her wealth, grandeur, and love. The girl was bewitched about Lady Redwoode, and Mr. Anchester may promise to secure her recognition as Lady Redwoode's daughter. It is all very simple. No constancy can stand such

assaults under such circumstances. Hellice went away in disgrace. In a single week more she may return in triumph!"

"Why don't you follow Mr. Anchester, and get Hellice into your power?" cried Cecile desperately. "We could shut her up somewhere, or—"

A significant silence completed the sentence better than words could have done.

"Mr. Anchester has doubtless prepared against such a step on my part. He is as keen as a detective, as suspicious as an escaped convict, and as guarded as a conspirator. He would lead me long wild-goose chases on false scents, while he was laying siege to Hellice's heart, and laughing in his sleeve at me. It is out of the question for me to pursue Hellice. Our true course lies in working a vein nearer home!"

"You mean by putting it out of Lady Redwoode's power to welcome Hellice when she returns!" answered Cecile, readily catching at Mr. Forsythe's idea. "Yes," she added, slowly, "that is our only course. It will be a difficult task, for Mr. Kenneth is as sharp-eyed as a ferret. He watches me too closely now!"

"We must go away from Redwoode. There are too many here to watch over her ladyship," said Mr. Forsythe hoarsely, his face flushing and paling alternately under the ebb and flow of his emotions. "I have thought out a plan, Cecile, and you must give me your co-operation. We will go somewhere on a bridal tour, and Lady Redwoode shall accompany us. We will stop in some lonely and retired spot—and when we leave it our position will be assured beyond all cavil!"

There was a deep, hidden, and deadly meaning in his tones that betrayed itself to Cecile, but she did not shrink from him in horror and afflict. His desperate look reflected itself in her face. She felt like him, that everything she held dear was at stake, and that she would scruple at nothing to attain wealth and position.

"But where to find the lonely house?" she said, in a whisper that even startled herself.

Mr. Forsythe, by way of reply, drew from his pocket a morning paper, and singled out from its advertisements one which he read aloud. It was as follows:

"To let—in a very retired part of the eastern coast, an old-fashioned dwelling-house. Would be an admirable situation for a family desiring extreme seclusion. Or would be let as a private asylum of any sort, for which purpose the place is well adapted. Address, Mr. Thomas Sorel, on the premises."

Then followed the address.

The place in question was that inherited by Margaret Sorel, but Mr. Forsythe did not even remark the coincidence of names.

"We will spend our honeymoon in that place," he said, refolding the paper and restoring it to his pocket. "I will write a letter to-day to this Sorel, preparing him for our coming. We must follow up our letter to-morrow. It is for you to persuade Lady Redwoode that a change of air will do her health good, and induce her to accompany us. Do you think you can accomplish the task?"

Cecile assented, adding:

"Renee must go with us. I cannot do without her, and we shall find her invaluable in our care of Lady Redwoode."

Mr. Forsythe made no objection to this addition to the bridal party. He knew that his bride would need the services of a maid, and congratulated himself that one so subservient to their wishes would accompany them. In his own heart he had begun to cherish schemes against the widow of his late uncle, daring and terrible schemes, from the execution of which his cowardly soul shrunk in terror. In the unscrupulous Hindoo he would possess a ready and willing instrument to carry out his designs. Renee's old hatred for the baroness, her worshipping love for Cecile, her love of luxury and power, her aversion to

Hellice, all conspired to make her a most efficient coadjutor, and he knew well that his darkest plotting would find in her a sympathizing friend.

So it was settled that Renee was also to go.

We will not dwell upon the interview between the newly-wedded couple. It was hideous with ingratitude, wicked cunning, base scheming; and, had not so much been at stake, the two plotters must have shrunk from each other in bitter loathing. Cecile proved herself a very serpent in guile, and Mr. Forsythe wondered at her familiarity with thoughts of crime, until he reflected that she had been all her life long under the tutelage of her ayah, the most guileful of her race. Their plans were developed, their future mapped out clearly and comprehensively, and at last their spirits rose, hope came back, and they dared to dream of a time when they should succeed to the domain of Redwoode without any fear of molestation.

While they talked, Renee listened at the door, with at times audible chuckles and exclamations of delight. The play of evil passions was sport to her. She clutched her casket of deadly drugs instinctively, and now and then muttered vengeful words in her native tongue, as if she felt herself triumphing over personal enemies.

At length, unable to restrain herself longer, she came out, and startled the two plotters by exclamations of approval.

"I have heard all," she said. "You had better have taken Renee into your confidence at first, but, never mind, I will help you all the same. Your brain, Mr. Forsythe, is not subtle enough for true cunning. Take me into your counsels, make me your friend and confidant, and I will bear the burden of your guilt."

She showed her white teeth, so like the pointed fangs of a beast of prey, and smiled as, in obedience to Cecile's desire, Mr. Forsythe granted her request.

"Be faithful to us, and you shall be well rewarded," he said. "Betray us, and you shall feel the weight of my vengeance!"

Renee turned her back upon him, but knelt beside her young mistress, and kissed the pretty, jewelled hand with rapturous fervour.

"As if Renee wanted rewards for serving her golden-haired daughter of the sun—her lily-faced pet!" she murmured, with strong emotion. "She will die for her, if need be—die and make no sign!"

"I know it," said Cecile, caressingly. "Mr. Forsythe meant no harm, Renee. But you know that you will share my prosperity. When Redwoode belongs to me, you shall sit all day long in the drawing-room, dressed in silks, with jewels in your ears, and you shall have servants to wait upon you as in your youthful days."

Her words had power to restore the calm to Renee's face, and the business under consideration was again discussed.

At length, the arrangements all completed, Mr. Forsythe retreated to his own apartments to write his letter to Mr. Borel, and Cecile arose and laid aside her bridal veil and flowers. Her robe was too becoming to be so soon discarded; besides, she wished to lose no time in visiting Lady Redwoode. She looked very fair and pretty, as she finally left the room, and made her way to the apartments of the baroness.

Her ladyship was reclining on a couch, her festive garments exchanged for a plainer, less significant attire. She looked pale, sad, and deeply troubled. She had just learned that Mr. Anchester had gone away, and without knowing of her desire to see him. She fancied that she saw Cecile's hand in his departure, and blamed herself severely for having been so confidential with Mr. Forsythe that morning.

The scales had nearly fallen from her eyes at last, and Cecile comprehended that her own footing had become precarious.

She crossed the room and knelt beside the baroness, with an assumption of child-like airs, and said with pretty blushes:—

"Dear mamma, I am come to ask a favour—a great favour. Will you grant it?"

"I can tell better when I know what it is," replied Lady Redwoode, coldly.

"I want to go somewhere on a little bridal tour, mamma. I want see something more of England, and it is so dismal here at Redwoode now that Hellice is gone. I cannot go, unless you will go with us."

"You ask too much, Cecile. I cannot go. Hellice may return at any moment, and I must be here to receive her!"

A thought flashed across Cecile's fertile brain, and she put it into good use.

"But, mamma," she said, "Andrew has got track of Hellice. She is somewhere on the northern coast, boarding in a family, I believe. Mr. Anchester told Andrew so, and I should like to go for my poor cousin. She has been punished enough for her errors. Do let us go for her, mamma!"

Lady Redwoode put one hand under Cecile's chin, raising her face so that she could read it like the open pages of a book. Cecile exercised all her powers of dissimulation, and forced into her countenance a look of truthfulness, frankness, and simple honesty that deceived the Baroness, and might well have deceived Lavater.

"How did Mr. Anchester know of Hellice's movements?" she asked.

Cecile replied by inventing a plausible tale, owing to a previous acquaintance with Mr. Anchester in India, describing him as Hellice's lover, stigmatizing him as a gambler and adventurer, and expressing her fears that he would compel Hellice into a marriage with him.

"We will follow him then at once," declared her ladyship. "Let us set out by the evening train. Get ready without delay."

She dismissed Cecile with this injunction, and set to work with feverish haste to prepare for her journey. No doubts of Cecile's truthfulness occurred to her. No imagination of personal harm crossed her mind. She saw no motive for a falsehood, and so believed Cecile's statement unquestioningly.

Mr. Forsythe was soon made aware of the success of his plans, and his delight was great. It suited him better, however, to postpone the journey until the morrow, and it seemed as if fortune were bestowing her choicest favours upon him; for the anxiety of the past few weeks, supplemented by the day's excitement, brought upon Lady Redwoode a severe nervous headache which effectually put off all travelling.

The day passed drearily enough for a marriage-day. Cecile was assiduous in her attentions to the Baroness, and flattered herself that she recovered much lost ground. Mr. Kenneth regarded her filial devotion as very charming, and took occasion to praise Cecile to her husband, and to speak condemnatorily of the exiled Hellice.

The next morning, Lady Redwoode expressed herself well enough for her journey, the carriage was brought round, and the little party took their seats, and were driven to Wharton. Renee was found in the waiting-room at the station, she having gone on in advance, but the Baroness made no objections to the woman's presence, attaching no significance to it. The tickets were purchased, and the travellers were soon whirling northward in an express train.

It was two hours past noon when they alighted from their coach at a pretty rural village in the Northern part of England. They went immediately to the principal inn, ordered rooms and are past, and were served in due course of time. As they gathered about the table, in the small private parlour, Mr. Forsythe said,—

"Our journey is almost accomplished. It is but three or four miles from the place where Hellice has gained a home. The sky threatens a shower, and I think we had better remain where we are for an hour or two. You both look fatigued, Lady Redwoode

especially, and an hour's rest will do you no harm."

This arrangement met with no dissent, and the ladies retired to their rooms as soon as dinner was over for a brief repose. Mr. Forsythe, with a satisfied smile, hurried downstairs, hired the best horses at command, and set out for his destination—the house that had been advertised to be let.

He was gone nearly two hours, but the time had been well spent, if one might judge by the expression of his eyes and face. He mounted the inn stairs, whistling softly to himself, and passed into his chamber to remove the dust of the road from his garments. He then returned to the little parlour, where the ladies, in travelling attire, awaited him.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Redwoode, for compelling you to wait so long," he said. "I fancied you were still asleep. The carriage is waiting."

The Baroness immediately arose, as did Cecile, and Mr. Forsythe conducted the ladies to the carriage that was waiting in the courtyard. Renee mounted to the box beside the driver, the luggage was put on, unnoticed by Lady Redwoode, and the carriage started.

"You are sure that Hellice is near here, Andrew?" asked the Baroness, with a sudden anxiety. "You are sure that we are not upon a false trail?"

"Quite sure," was the prompt response. "Mr. Anchester came to this village yesterday, and took the direction we are now taking."

Lady Redwoode aroused herself and looked keenly at the young couple beside her, as if some faint suspicion of intended wrong had entered her mind. She was tempted to ask questions which for the first time occurred to her, but she checked herself, and sank into a watchful silence.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

This hand, I cannot but in death resign.

—Dryden.

Take my esteem, if you on that can live,
For frankly, sir, 'tis all I have to give.

—Ibid.

HELICE, in her retreat at the Rookery, was unconscious of the threatening shadows that had begun to gather around the Lady of Redwoode. The young girl was seemingly contented in her new home. She spent much of her time out of doors among the odorous plants, down by the river-side, in the gardens, and on the adjacent mountain tops, and the result of her rambles might have been found in her blooming cheeks, her brightening eyes, and her increasing spirit of cheerfulness.

Her occupations were few and simple. She made sketches of the prettiest bits of scenery in the vicinity, visited some of the labourers' cottages, made a few purchases at the nearest village, and employed herself, after a desultory fashion, in making additions to her now scanty wardrobe.

She had an aversion to what is termed "fancy-work," and Mrs. Hartley soon discovered that this aversion extended itself to any employment of the needle. The housekeeper, therefore, relieved her guest of her labours in that way, paying no heed to Hellice's smiling remonstrances.

The duties of companion were soon lost sight of entirely. Mrs. Hartley found it difficult to keep up the rôle of rector's widow. She was most at ease in her ample kitchen, and she did not hesitate to confess this fact.

She sank, in truth, into her proper position of housekeeper, and elevated Hellice to the post of mistress, taking care not to alarm the young lady by a too prominent exposition of the real state of affairs.

The maiden came and went at her will, wandered through the gray old house, and through the wilderness-like gardens, plucked the few vagrant flowers that bloomed amidst

the thick weeds and grasses, and exercised all the privileges of an owner of the dwelling. She felt more freedom here than she had felt at Redwoode.

There were no sharp nor suspicious eyes to mark and misinterpret her movements or manners; and there was no sad and tender gaze to thrill her heart with incomprehensible yearning.

Mrs. Hartley loved her with a respectful devotion, and Sandy's admiration had deepened into the blind worship that a devotee might yield his saint. He followed her about like a dog, anticipated her wishes, believed himself her protector, and, in his own mind, fancied her the heroine of his favourite novels.

In this quiet, simple home, Hellice recovered her strength and courage. She resolutely refused to mourn over her trials and griefs.

A quiet and unwavering trust in Heaven, and its protecting love, was her steadfast anchor in the storms that had assailed her, and which had only paused to gather renewed strength to withstand their buffetings.

She cultivated a strong and cheerful spirit, and in a week had become the sunshine and comfort of the grim old place.

Yet, could one have looked into her chamber in the lonely hours of the night they would have seen the brave maiden brave no longer, but anguished, heart-stricken, and overwhelmed with a burden of woe too great for longer endurance. Those hours must be considered too sacred for further description.

Hellice soon discovered that the Rookery was only an hour's ride from the sea, and she made several excursions thither, accompanied by Sandy, making the journey in the rickety old chaise in the morning, and returning home in the evening twilight.

The scenery on the way became a source of unfailing delight after her Indian life, the mountains and river, rocks, and sea, became as personal friends to her, and she loved them accordingly.

One morning—a bright, fair, sunny morning—Sandy brought the chaise round to the door for one of these excursions, and Mrs. Hartley deposited within it a small hamper containing a host of dainties to refresh the young lady during the day. Sandy took into his own keeping a humble package of plainer food for himself, and stowed it away under the seat.

Hellice, in her broad-brimmed hat and a new muslin dress, one of her recent purchases, and with her Indian shawl on her arm, looked unusually lovely as she came out and ascended to her seat in the vehicle.

"I wish you were going too, Mrs. Hartley," she said, brightly. "I will perfect my sketch of that little bay, and bring you a whole load of sea-weeds."

"You are going to the South Cove, then?" asked the housekeeper.

Hellice replied in the affirmative, and bade the good woman a gay farewell.

Sandy cracked his whip, the horse started, and the housekeeper retreated into the house with something of an anxious look, muttering to herself that it was almost time for Mr. Anchester's promised visit, and that she should not at all wonder if he were to come that day.

Unconscious of Mrs. Hartley's expectations, Hellice forgot herself in her enjoyment of her drive. Their way to the sea lay in the direction opposite to that by which the maiden had first entered it. The road crossed the valley and ascended through a pass between the hills to an undulating plain that swept down to the sea. Thickly-clustering trees shaded the road for some distance, and the breeze sweeping through them wafted to Hellice delicious odours that were more inspiring than wine.

"How delightful!" murmured the girl, more alive to the beauties of the scene than ever before.

"Do you think so, miss?" asked Sandy, with a complacent expression on his freckled

face, and a satisfied smile on his lips, as if the praises were due to him personally. "I always thought it looked very well here. To my mind, that hill yonder would be just the place for a robbers' castle, and this pass here the ravine to 'back travellers in. Jest think, miss, how you'd feel to have Baron Hildebrand a springin' out o' that thicket with about a thousand followers—"

Hellice laughed merrily.

"I should depend upon you for protection, Sandy," she said. "I am sure you would defy the robbers and their chief, however great their number."

Sandy was immensely flattered by this extravagant expression of confidence in his valour and prowess, and declared that Miss Glintwick had judged him rightly, and that he would die, if need were, in her defence.

"Thank you, Sandy," returned Hellice, greatly amused at his dog-like fidelity and affection. "I hope I shall not be obliged to tax your strength or courage so heavily. Ah! Look out! Your horse will go off the bridge if you are not more attentive to him."

Thus recalled to his work, Sandy cracked his whip, to conceal his mortification in having been found remiss in his duty as driver, and pulled at the bit of his steed with such spasmodic energy that the poor beast was uncertain whether to advance or to retreat, and finally solved the difficulty by coming to an abrupt halt.

Sandy muttered anathemas under his breath, and urged on the horse to a dangerous rate of speed, considering the dilapidated condition of the vehicle, determined to show his young mistress that he was capable of managing even a more fiery animal than the one under his charge.

Hellice almost held her breath as they went rattling over the stony road and across the rustic bridge, and she felt strongly inclined to get out and walk through the pass, but the horse accommodated his speed to the abrupt ascent, and she therefore retained her seat. The pass was narrow, and shut in by high, steep hills, clothed in verdure. The sunshine did not penetrate to this secluded glade except at midday, and to the romantic imagination of the maiden the spot seemed a fitting home for all those fairies, elfs, and brownies, once so dear to the hearts of English people, and now beloved by poets and dreamers.

Thinking fanciful thoughts, and dreaming sweet dreams, born of the morning and scene, Hellice said little, and Sandy devoted himself to his steed. The drive was accomplished in the usual time, and the morning was still fresh and young when they came down to the wide and rocky beach, upon which the great, mirror-like sea played with musical murmurs.

Hellice alighted in the shadow of a great boulder, that looked like a giant's monument, and was full of clefts and nooks where shadows lay thickly. Sandy lifted out the hamper, and deposited it in one of the niches that had evidently served before as a secret store-house, placed beside it his own humble dinner, and then apologized for his absence while he took his equipage up to a fisher's cottage, in the vicinity of which was a shed that offered it protection. His young mistress in the meantime seated herself on the rocks and awaited his return.

The fisher's wife came out to the door of her cottage to receive the young lady's pleasant bow and smile, and the fisher's children came shouting to welcome her, for Hellice's sweet-sad face had won the hearty love of these simple hearts. The maiden's pockets were emptied of the little gifts she had brought, and the happy little ones toddled home again transported with delight, just as Sandy returned, rowing an old skiff that was as clean as hands could make it.

"You may row out into the bay, Sandy," said Hellice, arranging her shawl as a cushion, "and I will finish my sketch of the cove."

The lad obeyed, working with a will, while Hellice opened her parasol to shade her face, and sang sweet and tender little Hindoo idyls

that were freighted with an ineffable sadness. Arrived at the desired point, the young girl opened her portfolio, and proceeded to retouch her sketch of the strip of coast, while Sandy rested on his oars. An hour, two hours passed; the sketch was completed to the artist's satisfaction, and Sandy resumed rowing about the bay and up and down the coast. About noon he directed his tiny craft to a point of land jutting out into the sea, and here Hellice was obliged to land, the tide having left the beach bare for a considerable distance. It was a pleasant walk back to the great boulder, and Hellice stopped at the fisher's cottage to speak a few words to its occupants, and then continued her way alone, Sandy having been obliged to linger behind to care for the skiff.

The sea-air had given her an appetite, so she unpacked her hamper and ate her lunch in the pleasant solitude with considerable enjoyment, and full appreciation of Mrs. Hartley's kindness and consideration. A bottle of French wine she reserved from the hamper for Sandy's use, and the remaining untouched delicacies she distributed among the fisher's children, who again thronged about her, as bees throng around a flower. She then wandered off by herself up the coast for a ramble among the rocks.

It was a wild coast, looking as though a world had been wrecked upon its shores. The wildness and grandeur appealed to Hellice's love of the beautiful and the terrible. She loved to climb over the rocks, to gain a good outlook, and survey from it the smiling, treacherous sea, so full of syren wiles and lures to the unwary. Now she walked along the bits of beach that lay among the rocks, peeped into caverns where mermaids might have dwelt, and lingered in sunny little spots that were strangely out of place amidst all that chaos and rocky desolation.

She wandered on over nearly a mile of boulders and chasms, stopping at last at a gigantic towering cliff, whose summit commanded a magnificent view of sea and shore. She had never ascended this cliff, but she did so now, finding a foothold in precarious places, where a bird might have scorned to rest, and with no thought of danger in her preoccupied mind.

The top was gained at last, and Hellice, panting with fatigue, sank down upon a chair-like fragment of stone, and gave herself up to reveries. The time passed by unheeded, Sandy and the scene alike forgotten, until she was at last startled by a firm, heavy footfall behind her.

She raised her head, startled and half-frightened, and beheld Darcy Anchester!

Surprise held her mute and motionless for a moment, but, with an effort, she recovered herself and held out her hand in greeting.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Anchester," she said, with quiet dignity. "I understood you to say that you should not visit the Rookery."

"The Rookery has gained an attraction which I found myself unable to resist," declared the adventurer with awkward gallantry. "You are the magnet, Miss Hellice, and my heart turns to you as the needle to the pole!"

Hellice bowed very gravely in recognition of this compliment, and loosened the strings of her hat as if they choked her.

She possessed sufficient knowledge of the usages of society to understand that the Rookery could not afford a home to her and to this unwelcome lover at the same time, and already she fancied herself homeless.

She took off her hat and fanned herself with it in a perturbed manner, the rays of the declining sun touching the burnished ends of her dark hair and turning them to the purest gold.

(To be continued.)

THERE is nothing that weighs more heavily upon a right-minded man than the slow progress he makes in overcoming his faults.

FACETIÆ.

"WHATEVER you do, my boy, begin at the bottom and work up." "But, father, suppose I were going to dig a well?"

"No, Algernon, I cannot marry you. Papa will not allow it." "Why not?" "Because he says you are an actor." "Your father is much kinder than the press."

MAMMA: "But, Flora, how do you know that this young man loves you? Has he told you so? Flora: "Oh no, mamma. But if you could only see the way he looks at me when I am not looking at him."

FARMER: "I think there's been somebody fishing in our trout stream behind the barn." Farmer's Wife: "How do you know? Have you found a line and hooks?" Farmer: "No. I found a whisky flask."

"HAVE you read 'Half Hours with Insects'?" asked Alf Analf of Sim Pulton. "No," replied Sim; "I was out at the lake last evening, and read about two minutes with insects, and that was enough for me."

HE: "May I have the pleasure of the next?" She: "Oh I don't know. I think they are going in to supper." He: "O really—O I didn't know. If the beasts are going to be fed—er—perhaps I had better take you in to supper!"

THEY were boasting about ancestry. "My forefathers," said John, "came over from England in the *Mayflower*." "And my ancestors," said Pat, "kim over from Quansentown on the *Sunflower*. It's æsthetic I am, begorra."—*American Paper*.

"I HOPE, my dear," said a newly-made benedict, "if I should happen to be out nights occasionally you won't be lonely." "Oh no, dear," she replied, sweetly, "if you find it necessary to be out I'll send for me to keep me company." He's home early every night.

FIRST BLASÉ YOUTH (much demoralized): "By Gwage, Cholly! I'm completely exhausted; just assisted in saving—aw—young woman's life. Second Blasé Youth: "Brave fellow! But I didn't know you could swim, Fweddly." First Blasé Youth: "I cawn't. Another fellow did that part. I stood on the shore and screamed for help."

PROUD FATHER: "Welcome back to the old farm, my boy. So you got through college all right?" Farmer's Son: "Yes, father." "Ye know I told ye to study chemistry and things so you'd know best what to do with different kinds of land. What do you think of that flat mudder there, for instance?" "Cracky, what a place for a football match!"

"Who are you, I'd like to know?" said the man with the soap, corn remedy, and feather dusters to the woman who was scrubbing the threshold of the door, and refused to get out of his way. "I'm the lady that takes care of this floor, and we don't want any peddlers here." "I'm not a peddler," rejoined the man, in an injured tone; "I'm a sales-gentleman."

THE reports of burglars had made the mistress of the house cautious, and she reminded her maid of all-work that the door at the foot of the back stairs must be bolted at night, and told her the reason why. "They wouldn't come up stairs, would they?" asked Abigail. "They might," said the mistress. "And go in the rooms where folks are sleeping?" "Yes, indeed." "Well, if they ain't got cheek!"

"GOT any cow-bells?" "Yes, step this way." "Those are too small. Haven't you any larger?" "No, sir; the largest ones are all sold." Rustiana started off and got as far as the door, when the man called after him: "Look here, stranger, take one of these small bells for your cow, and you won't have half the trouble in finding her; for when you hear her bell you will always know she can't be far off." The farmer bought the bell.

"My dear," he said, "what is the difference between ingenious and ingenuous." "The difference between u and i," she replied, and he scratched his head for a diagram.

BUSINESS MAN: "You vagabond! You sent in word that you would see me on business, and when I ask you what your business is, you beg." Vagabond: "But you forget, sir; begging is my business."

"WELL, Lottie," said a young cadet from Nipandtuck, "which do you prefer, the army or the navy?" "I—I prefer the arm-y, George," replied the young girl, as he slipped his sleeve around her waist.

A LITTLE boy at a village school had written the word "psalm" in his copy-book, and accidentally blotted out the letter "p" with his sleeve. His little sister, sitting at his side, burst into tears over the disaster, but the spelling reformer defiantly exclaimed, "What if I did leave him out? He didn't spell nothing, and what was the good of him?"

TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION.—A Pole named Skrazevokshiszestovich committed suicide in prison by hanging. He had tied one end of his name around his neck and the other to an iron bar in the window of his cell. He was discovered before life was extinct, but could not be cut down, owing to the flinty nature of his name, which broke the edges of all the knives employed. He was eventually filed down.

TWO friends are walking along the street. One of them pointing to a house, says: "There's a beautiful place, but it's enough to make a man sad to look at it." "Why so?" "On account of its history; for, despite its calm and serene surroundings, it was built upon the groans, tears, wallings, and blood of widows, orphans, old men and straggling women." "You don't say so? Was it built by a railway monopolist?" "Oh, no; by a dentist."

A LONDON Sunday-school teacher was endeavouring to impress upon the minds of her little pupils the necessity of good behaviour. "You must be very careful how you act," said she, "for if you act badly you will be punished, while if you act good you will be rewarded. Now, my dears, can anyone tell me what he will get if he acts well?" A bright little fellow, whose father was an actor, immediately replied, "Det tailed before de turtain, I fink."

"TERRIBLE thing, this ice-cream sickness," remarked Charlie, as he was out walking with his girl. "It's caused by something or other called tyrotoxican. I'm told the ice-cream dealers have suffered a good deal of loss since its appearance. The girls are all afraid of it, you know." And Charlie grinned to himself. They walked on in silence. After a while she hung on his arm with both hands and murmured, "Charlie, dear, I do not know what fear is when I am with you."

CONVERTING THE HEATHEN.—A mob of white men in a California town cut off a Chinaman's queue, amputated one of his ears, and otherwise mutilated him, inflicting injuries which caused his death. The celestial was "obnoxious." The very same week two American missionaries sailed from San Francisco to China to labour among the heathen. It is suspected that they preferred to labour in a land where the prospects of converting the heathen are much brighter than at home.

"MOTHER," said the five-year-old demon, just as Mrs. Oldboy was preparing to leave home on a six weeks' visit, "what's become of the fur you used to wear last winter?" "Looked up, Willie; why?" "Say, has wings growed on it?" "No; why do you ask such silly questions?" "Cause I heard pap say this mornin' he would make the fur fly while you are away." The trunks were at once unpacked, and the look that came into Mrs. Oldboy's face made the clock strike thirty-four.

IT DOES EXCITE THE RISIBILITIES.

No funnier sight ever striketh the eye

Than this:

A bald-headed man make a swoop at a fly And miss.

A TALENTED YOUNG LADY.—"Yes," said Mrs. Olrich to a friend, "my daughter has just graduated at the Oakdale Female Cemetery, and next season she is going to the Observatory of Music to finish her musical edification."

A DARK LOOK OUT.—The scientists have figured it all out, and have arrived at the conclusion that the earth will stop revolving in 6,000,000,000 years. This is a dark look-out for us—especially if it should stop revolving in the night time, when the sun is on the other side of us. Our electric light and gas bills would be frightful!

THE NEW BONNET.

MISS ENDORA thought her bonnet would look "so sweet."

If 'twere built thirty-seven inches higher; And the first time she wore the thing in the street,

'Twas frightfully wrecked by a telegraph wire.

OMAHA MAN: "Are those pug dogs intelligent?" Omaha lady (proud owner of pug): "Oh, their intelligence is almost human." "I am surprised to hear that." "I can't begin to tell you how much the dear little fellows know. Mercy me! Jane, Jane! Where are you?" "Here, mum." "Run out as fast as you can and bring the dog in. It's raining."

SEEING AND HEARING.—A woman can see with perfect distinctness with her eyes tight shut. This is a peculiar gift; but there are thousands of husbands in the land who, owing to their ill-success in sneaking upstairs at 2 A.M. in their stocking feet without waking their wives, are willing to swear that there are plenty of women who can hear with their ears tight shut.

A QUEER CUSTOM.—When an Arab woman intends to marry again, she fears her dead husband will be offended; so, in order to keep him cool under the irritating circumstances, she procures two goatskins of water and pours them on his grave. In this country a widow is not so foolish. Her dead husband is cool enough—or, at least, his body is. It is the second husband who wants to be kept cool under irritating circumstances, and pouring two goatskins of water on him would fail to accomplish that desirable object. On the contrary, it would only make him that much hotter.

THE LAY OF THE HEN.—The American condor lays its eggs on the surface of rocks 15,000 feet above the level of the sea; and this shows what a goose the American condor is. The bird lives far away from the busy haunts of men and boys—especially boys—and its nest would be safe from the depredations of the latter if it were to build it several thousand feet nearer the earth. If the American condor was a plain, every-day barn yard hen it would be different. The hen might ascend in a balloon and lay her eggs 5,000 miles above *terra firma*, and yet they wouldn't be safe from the clutches of the predatory small boy—not unless they were laid in the bosom of a floating cloud.

ANOTHER "WAR PAPER."—A writer in a medical journal says that during the Sappo mutiny, thousands of rebels, as soon as they heard the Scotch bagpipes, clasped their hands over their stomachs and rolled on the ground in agony, as if stricken with cholera. It is not surprising. When it comes to choice between an attack of cholera and a Scotch bagpipe overture, most people will prefer a dose of green cucumbers. When the next war breaks out in this country our army should be composed of deaf men armed only with bagpipes, instead of guns, swords, and other deadly weapons. When the enemy were rolling on the ground in great agony, they could easily be taken prisoners. There would be more suffering, of a nurse, but less bloodshed.

SOCIETY.

THE Prince and Princess were present at the opening ceremony of the new Church of St. Alban at Copenhagen. Funds have not come in so plentifully as was at first expected, and the church is minus a peal of bells. The Prince, hearing of this at once ordered a set to be cast at his expense. Our Royalties are renewed for their sympathy with religious and charitable undertakings, and bearing this in view, many an extra sum has been collected by worldly-wise folks anxious to figure on the same platform with a Prince or Princess, if but for a moment. The purse-presentation scheme, from first to last, must have netted a great deal of money that would otherwise have gone in very different directions.

THE Princess of Wales at Fredensborg, says *Modern Society*, is allotted the room which at other times has been used as the dining-room; it is situate in one of the wings, and is hung with some of the finest paintings in the Royal collection. The King and Queen of the Hellenes and their children occupy the opposite wing; the Prince of Wales has sleeping accommodation in the yacht *Osborne*, it having been absolutely beyond the powers of the actual building to provide even one more bedroom within its limits. Our own party of Royalties were among the jolliest of all this cheerful crew, and "Uncle Bertie" was immensely popular with his many nieces and nephews. But there was a little drawback to the delights of this otherwise unalloyed festivity; the Castle had to be surrounded by a cordon of Russian and Danish Police, who watched over the Czar's comings and goings with a vigilance that is truly appalling in the significance of hidden danger.

THE Prince of Wales returned to town, accompanied by his eldest son Prince Albert Victor. His Royal Highness is afterwards going to Scotland on a visit to his boon companion, the Earl of Fife, at Mar Lodge, for some shooting; and goes afterwards to Balmoral, to visit his mamma, like a good boy. The Princess of Wales will not return to London until the middle of next month.

A GOOD story is going the rounds with regard to the Prince of Wales's relations with his Sovereign Lady Mother. It appears that some wits, who thought to tickle the ears of the Heir Apparent by a slighting way of speaking of his mother, hit on the idea of calling her surroundings contemptuously, "the old Court." Bertie let it pass with his usual good-humoured *laissez-faire*, and took no pains to prevent its ever-reaching the Queen's ears. When it did, Her Majesty laughed immoderately, and remarked, "That's all very well; but they will find 'there's life in the old Court yet!'"

PRINCE FERDINAND of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who has been trying to reign in Bulgaria, needs a rest. He has worked so hard lately that he is exhausted and must have a holiday. It is said that he will take his vacation in the form of a tour, and will visit the different capitals of Europe. It is thought that when he leaves the capital of Bulgaria he will then visit every other capital but that, and will end his trip at his paternal home. In short, that his vacation trip will be a more or less graceful way of stepping down and out. It is probable that this thought is the right one. Ferdy took the place on trial, and the trial is not satisfactory. The Bulgarians wanted a Prince—not a Prince and a court, and a horde of hungry loafers. Ferdy brought too many with him, and the Bulgarians have discovered that the only way to get rid of those who came with him is to send Ferdinand home to his intriguing mother, Princess Clémentine.

STATISTICS.

THE fifth report upon the working of the Boiler Explosions Act shows a satisfactory decrease in the number of accidents, compared with previous years. In 1882-3 there were 45 explosions, in the next year there were 41, the year following 43, then 57, and last year 37. Perhaps the working of this Act has tended to educate some of those in charge of steam boilers in the conditions of safety. There is still, however, a good deal of ignorance remaining. What is to be said of the insane recklessness displayed in the use of a boiler thirty-four years old and working it at double the pressure it was intended for when new? In each of the thirty-seven cases last year, the cause of the explosion was clearly made out, and in most of them it would certainly have been possible to indicate the danger by a very slight examination before the mischief occurred, though five of these exploding boilers were actually under the inspection of insurance companies. The Assistant Secretary of the Board of Trade says, however, that in only three would a more thorough inspection have revealed the defect which occasioned the explosion; and, all things considered, he is inclined to think that the examinations made under the directions of the companies have, in the main, been conducted upon a satisfactory system. By-and-bye it will be important to remember that in the course of the year to which this report refers there were three explosions of heating apparatus caused by severe frost. Pipes got choked with ice, and nothing in the nature of a safety-valve was provided. Altogether twenty-four lives were lost last year by exploding boilers.

GEMS.

I DISLIKE an eye that twinkles like a star. Those only are beautiful which, like the planets, have a steady, lambent light, are luminous but sparkling.

ROUND dealing is the honour of man's nature; and a mixture of falsehood is like alloy in gold and silver, which may make the metal work better, but it embaseth it.

HE that provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity, is wise for a moment, but a fool for ever, and acts as untowardly and crossly to the reason of things as can be imagined.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RICE SPONGE-CAKE.—Beat up three eggs for two minutes, add the peel of a lemon finely rasped. Boil six ounces of loaf sugar in half a gill of water, and pour it, boiling, on to the eggs. Whisk the mixture for twenty minutes, or until it is very thick. The success of the cake depends on this being properly done. Have ready mixed two ounces of flour and three ounces of rice-flour, and stir lightly into the batter. Bake in small tins, greased and sifted with a mixture of sugar and rice-flour.

OYSTER CHARTREUSE.—Boil and mash six large mealy potatoes with a little milk, pepper, and salt, an ounce of butter, and the whites of four eggs beaten to a froth. Butter a large mould, and then sprinkle fine dry crumbs, either of biscuit or bread, all over. Then completely line the mould with the potatoe-paste. Boil a pint of cream with onion, &c., for eight minutes, and slightly thicken with flour. Boil as many oysters as will nearly fill your mould in their own liquor, season, skim, and drain, add the oysters to the cream, and pour all in. Put on a thick crust of the mashed potatoes, and bake in a hot oven for half an hour. Let it stand for ten minutes before turning out on a dish, and take care that the crust does not break. Garnish with parsley, and serve.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A CORMORANT was seen in Upper Norwood the other day. Such a purely marine bird rarely ventures so far inland, and it is conjectured that the firing in the Channel manœuvres frightened the cormorant from its usual haunts. It stayed two hours on a chapel steeple.

A SUBMARINE tramway is to be constructed in Normandy. It will run along the sands between the watering places of Deauville, Villers, Cabourg, and Honfleur during the bathing season, from July to October. The rails will be pulled up for the winter. These sands are dry at low water, so there will be little difficulty in making the tramway, which is to be driven by steam.

THE electric light is being tried in the Scottish fisheries. As fish are invariably attracted by a strong light—witness the flaming torches used in the night salmon fishery—a powerful electric lighting apparatus has been fitted to a steamer plying on the fishing-grounds round the Isle of May, at the mouth of the Firth of Forth. It is confidently expected that the brilliant lure will bring a good haul.

MADAME SARAH BERNHARDT has brought home a young tiger-cat from Buenos Ayres as her latest pet. "Tigrette" is a beautiful little creature, about the size of an ordinary cat, with copper-coloured fur, black spots, and very brilliant eyes. At present "Tigrette" only snarls and gently bites those who try to make friends with her, but as she grows up she threatens to become rather a dangerous plaything.

THE Jubilee mania has passed from England to France, where there is a perfect *furor* for ornaments, ribbons, and knick-knacks of all kinds *à la Jubilé de la Reine Victoria*. For once the French condescend to borrow a fashion from despised Albion, and the English rose is the flower of the season, either the real blossom as a bouquet for the waistbelt, the artificial bloom on hat and bonnet, or the flower printed on dresses and ribbons.

THE Dog-Messenger Corps for the German army is being carefully trained just now by the Schwerin garrison. Swift and intelligent dogs are chosen, and are taken out by the patrols regularly to the outposts, where pencil notes are tied to their collars, and the dogs are dispatched back to a given point. When any of the garrison are manœuvring at night the dogs accompany the advanced sentinels of the bivouac, and are taught to watch for and bark violently at the faintest sign of any one approaching the camp.

A TERRIBLE SOUND.—How does an earthquake sound? A frightful grinding noise, harsh grating terrible, like the passing of some giant removal's van carrying Cleopatra's Needle or Memnon's Head; a sound as of the passing by of the biggest traction engine that was ever made, multiplied by forty; a sensation of being shaken violently in one's bed, in a house that shook and rattled and vibrated with an ever increasing violence, which seemed to presage the immediate fall and ruin of the building. And ten seconds of this means frightful calamity.

FEMINE industries of the world are to be extensively represented at the Glasgow Exhibition next year. There will be a special Women's Section, as the Lady Presidents want to show exactly what share women bear in the manufactures of the present time. Not only needlework is to be exhibited, but such mechanical branches as feather-dressing, book-binding, fishing-tackle manufacture, glove-making, and the like. Decorative industries, including carving, brasswork, painting, and engraving will find a place, as well as feminine hygienic clothing. Old-fashioned and inartistic fancy-work will be strictly excluded, such as crochet antimacassars, Berlin wool-work, shell and wax flowers, &c.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

F. M. P.—We regret we cannot accept the poem.
 KITTY.—All letters and presents should be returned on both sides, but you cannot compel him to do so.
 "TWO ANXIOUS HOUSEMAIDS."—We do not understand the expression, but it certainly seems to us neither elegant nor complimentary.
 ERRA.—It entirely depends on the lady and the agreement. Menial duties are rarely expected, but as a rule reading aloud, writing letters, playing and singing, keeping accounts and shopping, form the usual duties.
 H. C.—The rule of human proportion is "twice round the head is once round the waist." As a man's girth is usually from thirty to forty inches you can figure out for yourself the proper size of head in each individual case.

A. M.—Sixteen is too young for a girl to come out in general society. Use white castile soap with one drop of carbolic acid in a basin of water to remove tan and pimples. Wear your dresses within three inches of the ground.

JACK BLUNT.—1. There is no record, but the authorities would hardly enquire into the alcoholic propensities of a murderer. 2. There are several lanes so called: one of the best known is at Dulwich. 3. Very unformed.

F. C. S.—At the age and height given a girl should weigh between one hundred and ten and one hundred and thirty pounds. You write well, but use too fine a pen, and your character by graphological rules is a very promising one.

A. R.—For nervousness consult a physician. Surgery alone can straighten bow legs, and that not much. Your writing is not by any means "the worst we ever saw," but, on the contrary, delightfully plain, in spite of evident nervousness.

C. C. W.—There is no recognized weight for any height, though there are proportionate sizes. Differences in bone are such that one person may be twenty pounds heavier than another of the same height yet look much lighter. The hair is dark-brown.

M. R.—If you feel that you have been hasty and cross to your undeclared lover tell him so the first good chance you have, in a lady-like, dignified way, and leave the rest to him and Providence. You write very well, but make mistakes in grammar.

W. W. G.—You had better stop using a medicine that makes you thin. It cannot agree with you. The waist you wear with a silk skirt depends on taste and convenience. You can have one of velvet or lace, or the all-prevailing jersey, just as suits you.

C. R.—Unless your letters are compromising don't try to reclaim them. Let the whole matter drop in a lady-like way, and if you meet your recreant lover, instead of sulking in silence give him your most haughty bow and smile, but nothing more.

S. W. R.—Sweets and fats are good to increase flesh. No, boys often grow till they are twenty-three. There is no average weight for any age. Work will harden your hands, and camphor and tallow at night will heal the soreness consequent to the process.

W. G. C.—Light hair, fair skin and blue eyes make you a blonde. Yes, it is very wrong to encourage a man you do not care for. Respectful love is the highest honour that can be paid a woman, and should be either honestly accepted or as honestly put aside.

M. B.—You had better stick to your present employment. It is one of the safest and best paid open to those so unfortunate as to lack education, and quite as honourable as any if well followed. Try a lemon before breakfast for a week, and see if it does not improve your skin.

L. C. K.—Fair skin, blue eyes, and flaxen hair make you a demi-blonde. The only way you can get that aggravating young man who persists in seeing other girls to "just go with you" is to be yourself so thoroughly charming you will shame them "as daylight doth a lamp."

S. S.—One hundred and forty is by no means too much flesh for five feet seven inches. Your waist should be larger rather than smaller than twenty-six inches for a good figure, and from what you say of your hair it must be "golden-brown," sure enough. Thanks for the recipes.

T. B.—It is decidedly not wrong for you to hate to have your betrothed to mention the subject of marriage. He should expect nothing else of a woman of delicacy. Tell him so plainly, and that perfect love casteth out fear. Your writing is neat and lady-like, and indicates affection.

W. F. G.—Religious and political subjects prove of interest only to those directly interested in the special question in point, and therefore cannot be given a place here. Then, again, opinions differ so greatly on both these matters that we prefer to remain silent, and allow correspondents to settle such discussions among themselves.

V. L. M.—Kissing married men and "loving them as brothers and fathers" is a very risky business for a girl. It has been known time and again to bring trouble upon those who went into it "thinking no harm." Confine your kissing to your own father and brother until you have a lawful right to kiss some other girl's brother. Brown eyes are usually supposed to show an affectionate disposition, and grey ones to indicate intellect.

E. M. A.—The penmanship, composition, and spelling exhibited in your letter all command the greatest praise, being beautiful and correct in every particular.

M. C.—As you are only seventeen the gentleman probably only means to be jocular in speaking of you as his intended wife. One hundred and twenty-nine is a good weight for that age.

T. W.—Your writing is very legible—an excellent hand for business or correspondence—punctuation good, grammar good except in one instance—use of singular verb where the subject is plural.

E. S. W.—The young lady of sixteen who is five feet three inches in height and weighs a hundred and thirty pounds has already attained the happy mean. It is quite fashionable now to use wax and a seal in closing an envelope.

M. I. W.—In introduction say, "Miss Smith, let me present Mr. Brown," and content yourself with a bow and a kind word in acknowledging one. The hair is bright-brown. Your writing is fair, and indicates sensibility.

H. C.—Let severely alone the young man who is angry because your mother wishes you not to associate with him. No doubt she has good reason for her opposition. A private soldier is still a human being, and in the house of God, which the church ought to be, all such should meet as equals.

NITA.—You did right to dismiss a lover who frequents disreputable society. The proportions given indicate a very plump "girl of seventeen." To complete your quotation would take more space than the column can give. Consult a volume of Bacon. You write fairly, but your grammar and construction are faulty.

THE HEART FLOWER.

I wander amidst a scene
 Where the leaves and blossoms fall,
 With the knowledge that in my heart
 Blooms a flower surviving all.
 The Summer is fading away,
 The roses are drooping fast,
 And the mantle of green grows dim
 That over the earth is cast.

Soon the Autumn will bring its frost,
 And the Winter its storms and snows,
 And the blast and the oak and pine
 Will struggle like deadly foes;
 And the clouds driving low o'erhead
 Like batteries hurl their hail;
 But never can either, or all,
 The rose in my heart assail.

Yes, the glories of Summer die,
 And the honours of mortals dim
 And the pleasures of sense will pall
 With the wine still at the brim;
 But the love that is born of truth
 Is a flower that never fades;
 In the bosom its beauty glows,
 And its fragrance through all pervades!

W. B. D.

S. S. P.—Don't worry about your propensity to blush. It is rare enough to please as a novelty if nothing more. Use dumb-bells and do housework that will exercise your arms in order to broaden your chest. Expand your lungs by taking full, long breaths early in the morning. Swing your arms when you walk. Your writing is quite clear, but lacks the elegance that may come with practice.

R. D. C.—1. There are several recipes for making aquarium cement; but the following can be relied on as one of the simplest and most durable. It consists of one part, by measure, of litharge; one part plaster of paris; one part fine beach sand; one-third part fine powdered rosin; mix all well together. This may be kept for years, while dry, in a well-corked bottle; when used, make in a putty with boiled linseed oil; a little patent drier may be used; it will stand water at once, either salt or fresh; but the fat should not be put in the water until the cement becomes dry, as the litharge and rosin may produce disastrous effects. 2. As there are several dealers in birds, gold fish and the like in your city, no trouble need be experienced in stocking your aquarium.

F. F.—1. In the palace of the Mnemonium, Thebes, Egypt, an inscription, ascribed to the fourteenth century a.c., refers to a "hall of books" as forming a part of that magnificent structure. This is, perhaps, the earliest mention of a library on record. In 650 b.c. Sardaniapalus, the Assyrian king, caused a series of inscribed tablets to be prepared in clay for the instruction of his subjects. The first public library of which any record is given was founded by Pisistratus, at Athens, in 540 a.c. The next was founded, in 324 a.c., at Alexandria, Egypt, by Ptolemy Philadelphus. In the year 197 a.c., Atalus founded a library at Pergamus, Asia Minor, which, according to Plutarch, contained 200,000 books. The Palatine Library at Rome was established in 28 a.c. The earliest libraries in Christian countries were those attached to the churches. 2. According to computations made by reliable persons, 87,000 persons could be accommodated within the limits of the ancient Coliseum at Rome. 3. St. Peter's at Rome occupies the site of a basilica erected by Constantine in 306; it was founded in 1503 by Julius II. and dedicated by Urban VIII. in 1626. Its erection was carried on by twelve architects, among whom were Bramante, Raphael, Michael Angelo and Maderno. St. Paul's, in London, was founded in 1675 and finished in 1710.

C. N. T.—A long, straight nose indicates shrewdness. The hair is brown, and makes you, with brown eyes, a brunette. Try cold bathing and exercise moderate at first, for your flushes. As to the gentleman, if womanly sweetness and modesty will not win him, let him go very cheerfully.

W. S.—The growth of the skull proceeds slowly after the seventh year, but a slight increase goes on to about the age of twenty. Consequently the bones of the face do not enlarge as we grow older, but the contour of that portion of the body may increase by reason of an accumulation of fat, a very usual case at middle age.

K. M. P.—We advise you to abandon the thought of going upon the stage. The chances of success are all against you, for you lack the necessary training, not to refer to other deficiencies of which you seem to be conscious. It takes a life-time almost, in some cases, for an actress to achieve even a respectable livelihood. The profession of the stage is an arduous one, to say the least, and but few, comparatively, rise to eminence in it.

A. M. C.—Carrier pigeons are noted for their love of home, and will find their way back when taken hundreds of miles away. For this reason they have been used from the most ancient times in carrying letters. Hence their name. They are taught as soon as they are strong enough to fly, by being taken in a covered basket to some place not very far from home, and set free. Those that return are taken much farther away the next time, and so the distance is extended until it is found that they will return no matter how long the journey may be.

A. L. B.—The Coburg family is a family of sovereign German dukes, originating in the fifteenth century, and now celebrated for intermarriages with European royal families. A sister of Duke Ernest I., who died in 1844 was the Duchess of Kent, Mother of Queen Victoria; and his brother, Leopold, whose first wife was a daughter of George IV. of England, and his second wife a daughter of Louis Philippe, became the first King of the Belgians; while Albert, son of Duke Ernest I., and brother of the reigning Duke of Coburg, Ernest II., was the Consort of Queen Victoria.

P. D.—One of Charles Reade's earliest literary efforts was a five-act drama entitled "Gold." His first story was "Peg Woffington," which immediately gave him high rank as a writer of fiction. This was followed by "Christie Johnstone," and in 1854, in conjunction with Tom Taylor, he published a volume of plays, one of which—"Masks and Faces"—was a dramatization of "Peg Woffington." "Hard Cash" was the title of one of his works, which, from his forcible manner of presenting facts regarding the abuses of lunatic asylums, led to a revision of the English lunacy laws.

L. N. N.—Samuel Coleridge, the poet, thus tells why love is blind:

"I have heard of reasons manifold
 Why love must needs be blind,
 But this is the best of all, I hold,
 His eyes are in his mind.
 What outward form and features are
 He guesseth but in part;
 But what within is good and fair
 He seeth with the heart."

These are the lines to which your friend makes reference.

T. L. H.—China Proper, or the Eighteen Provinces, as it is called by the natives, occupies the eastern slope of the table-lands of Central Asia, covering a surface of at least 1,400,000 square miles. It is inhabited by more than 400,000,000 of the human race, living under the same government, ruled by the same laws, speaking the same language, studying the same literature, possessing more sameness of nature, a history extending over a larger period, and a more enduring natural existence than any other people whether of ancient or modern times. The Great Wall of China is estimated to be 1,250 miles in length, and was built by the first emperor of the Tsin dynasty about 220 a.c.

E. B.—A lady who makes the acquaintance of a strange man in the street should be very careful how she acts, as such meetings generally result in the most harmful results. To be sure, in the case cited, he rendered a service by escorting you across the crowded street; but such an action is no more than can be expected of any gentleman, and he has shown himself to be possessed of unlimited impudence and ill-breeding in asking for your address. Having assisted you in the manner described, he should have simply bowed his acknowledgment to your thanks and passed on. Do not allow him to call on you until you have become perfectly satisfied by careful inquiry that he is a fit person to be admitted into your home circle.

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